Introduction

This is one of the most common reasons for patients visiting a foot and ankle surgeon. The complex anatomy in this region predisposes to injuries from trips, falls, accidents and sports. Ankle sprains are the most common condition presenting to orthopaedic surgeons and whilst they may seem innocuous, they can lead to persistent pain and instability around the ankle joint. Fractures around this region are generally complex and the operating surgeon must understand the dynamic relationship between the bones and relevant ligaments in this region. If ligaments aren’t treated properly then this causes ongoing instability around the joint meaning that the ankle is likely to ‘wear out’ more quickly than it would if it were stable.

The ankle is one of the least forgiving joints in the body, so it is especially critical to optimise stability and delay the onset of early wear and tear arthritis (osteoarthritis) for as long as possible.

Just like the ankle, the foot has an intricate arrangement of bones and ligaments which can lead to many foot injuries being missed. Clinical signs and x-ray findings are also often very subtle.
Foot and ankle injuries

Treatment

Treatments depend on the nature of injury sustained. Here are some of the more common treatments used:

Orthotics: Use of an ‘aircast’ or ‘black boot’ may be used to provide additional stability to the foot and ankle whilst ligaments or bones are healing.

Physiotherapy: This is critical for many conditions. By keeping joints moving, we can reduce the onset of any ‘wear and tear’ arthritis (osteoarthritis). Physiotherapy is also very helpful in strengthening muscles, tendons and ligaments around the joints as well as helping with restoring proprioception.

Plaster casts: These can be used to immobilise limbs whilst they are healing or after surgery. They can be moulded to match the shape of patient’s specific feet and ankles whilst also providing protection from minor knocks. It may be that patients have to take medication to reduce their risks of blood clots whilst in a plaster cast.

Surgery: The principle aims of surgery are to restore anatomy by getting the bones and ligaments to heal in the correct places. By achieving this, ongoing pain, instability and risk of early ‘wear and tear’ arthritis (osteoarthritis) can all be reduced. Specific surgical intervention depends on the various ligament, tendons or bones that have been injured.

Patients will also be provided with a personalised treatment plan following their individual operations.