
General Risks of Orthopaedic Surgery

The decision to undertake surgical management of any condition requires serious thought, discussion and understanding which must include discussion with your Surgeon and the provision of appropriate information. Please feel free to discuss any of your concerns or anything you feel you don't understand well in advance.

Every operation has a risk of complications. Your surgeon is very experienced but despite best efforts complications do occur on occasion. Specific procedures vary in both the nature and risk of certain complications and further information regarding your procedure will be discussed.

This document will outline the general risks of Orthopaedic Surgery.

Wound Infection

Wound infection occurs when skin germs (bacteria or fungi) enter a surgical wound and are able to take hold. The most common source is the patient's own skin and you may have surgical swabs taken prior to Hip and Knee Replacement surgery to assess for any issues prior to your surgical date. Other sources of infection include intravenous lines, catheters, the environment (particularly in prolonged hospital stays) and other people. Infection is reduced in surgery by the use of Intravenous Antibiotics in some procedures but not in others. It is standard therapy in most cases to have 1 to 3 doses of intravenous antibiotics at the time of your surgery, however, the use of antibiotics following surgery has been shown to be more often harmful than beneficial and is mostly avoided.

Things you can do to reduce your risk of infection include decreasing smoking, controlling any issues with blood sugar or immunocompromising medications and maintaining intact and clean skin. For some procedures you may be offered pre-surgery washes for use at home.

Bleeding

Blood transfusion following orthopaedic surgery is now relatively rare due to modern blood management techniques. Larger procedures with longer operating times may increase this risk as may the use of blood thinning medications. If you are on Blood thinners you may need to cease these prior to surgery and your surgeon can provide you with information on when to safely do

this. Bleeding from damage to Major Blood Vessels can also occur during surgery and may require surgical repair. Rarely loss of this blood supply to a limb can cause serious harm.

Nerve Injury

In general all surgery involving incision of skin can lead to altered sensation or painful scarring. This is considered normal and is expected. More complex surgery around more sensitive areas such as the foot and hand are more prone to nerve injury or problems with nerve dysfunction or pain following surgery. Most of the time nerves will recover, however, the process can be slow and some surgeries which require resection of neural tissue such as neuroma resection will lead to permanent predictable nerve changes and loss of sensation. Rarely muscle weakness may also result from nerve damage at the time of surgery.

Blood Clot

Deep Vein Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism are the medically concerning 'Blood Clots'. Deep Vein Thromboses usually occur in the lower limb venous system and are thought to be related to inflammation, poor mobility and some patient factors which are rarely modifiable. They are common and may cause pain and swelling which can slow your rehabilitation and require treatment when symptomatic. A Pulmonary Embolism is a more serious blood clot which occurs in the Lungs and can be life threatening.

Every effort is made to decrease these complications while also maintaining a balance of safety. Blood thinning medications, early mobilization, the use of leg pumping devices and surgical techniques that minimise trauma are used to decrease the risks of these complications, but they are not preventable in all cases.

Anaesthesia

Modern Anaesthesia is safe for the majority of people, however, risks increase if you have pre existing medical compromise. Your anaesthetist will discuss the type of anesthetic they intend to use and the risks involved prior to your surgery and design the best anesthetic for you.

This brochure is a brief overview and not designed to be all-inclusive. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the rooms.