

# Surgery to correct toe walking

## Information for patients, parents and guardians

It's common for children under three to walk on their 'tiptoes'. As the child gets older they should start to walk with their heels down. Sometimes however the child continues to 'toe walk' and an operation to correct this may be recommended. Toe walking may be caused by a short Achilles tendon, which attaches the calf muscle to the heel. This causes tightness in the calf muscle, which raises the heel and stops it touching the ground when the child is walking. The medical name for the operation is 'gastrocnemius recession' (sometimes referred to as a Baker's slide or a Strayer release). It works by lengthening the tight calf muscle, correcting the toe walking.

### The operation

Your child will need a general anaesthetic (medicine given to make them go to sleep) for this operation. A surgical cut is made to the top of the Achilles tendon (the tendon on the back of the heel) where it attaches to the calf muscle, releasing the tightness so that the foot can be flexed up. There will be one scar, measuring two to three centimetres, on the back of the lower leg, in the middle. A plaster cast (from the toes to below the knee) holds the foot in the corrected position. Your child will need to stay in hospital for one night after the operation. The following day the cast is strengthened with a fibreglass covering. The stitches under the plaster cast are dissolvable, so do not need to be removed.

Pain-relieving medicine will be given as required to keep your child comfortable.

### Aftercare

Your child will be able to walk on their plaster cast 48 hours after the operation. Sometimes, older children may need help from the physiotherapist and find it more comfortable to use crutches for support. You may find that a wheelchair is helpful for going out; this can be borrowed from the British Red Cross, see the useful links section. It's a good idea to contact them as soon as you know the operation date. The plaster casts stay on for four to six weeks. To improve the position, sometimes the casts are changed (which may require your child to have another general anaesthetic). When the casts have been removed your child can walk and gradually build up their activities, as comfort allows.

Sometimes plastic splints are prescribed to be worn at night for three months to help hold the foot in its corrected position. These are kept in place with Velcro tabs.

### What happen if my child does not have the operation?

Other methods of treatment may already have been tried; such as physiotherapy, plaster casts or splints. If these have not been completely successful, surgery is an alternative solution. Not having the operation may mean that your child will always struggle to walk with their heels down and over time this may become uncomfortable for them.

### **Possible complications**

Your child's healthcare team will ensure their stay in hospital and the treatment they receive is as safe as possible. However, all medical procedures carry some risk and there is a possibility that complications might arise. You should ask the healthcare team if you would like any more information about complications or if there is anything you do not understand.

### **Complications from general anaesthetic**

Your child's anaesthetist will discuss this with you before the operation.

### **General complications of surgery**

- **Bleeding:** this can happen during or after surgery.
- **Scarring:** there may be scarring as a result of the surgical cut.
- **Infection:** if the surgical wound becomes infected antibiotics will be given but if infection occurs this may sometimes require further surgery.
- **Altered feeling:** there may be altered feeling at the operation site, this may be temporary or permanent.

### **Specific complications of surgery**

Occasionally the corrected heel position is not maintained and the operation may need to be repeated at a later date.

### **If you have any questions or concerns please contact:**

The nurse practitioners: **023 8120 4991** Mobile: **07584 402438**

Ward G3: **023 8120 6486**

### **Useful links**

The British Red Cross

Telephone: **0300 456 1914**

[www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/borrow-a-wheelchair](http://www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/borrow-a-wheelchair)

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