

# Cartiva implant for big toe arthritis

**This leaflet explains what surgery involves and outlines what to expect before, during and after your operation.**

## What is big toe arthritis (hallux rigidus)?

Hallux rigidus is arthritis of the main joint of the big toe in the ball of the foot. It is a wearing out of the joint surfaces. The commonest problem is pain and stiffness in the big toe joint. A bony bump may also develop on top of the joint which may rub on your shoes.

## What are the treatment options?

As with arthritis of any joint, avoiding those activities which cause the symptoms is one option. Anti-inflammatory medications and gels may also help. Non-surgical treatment will not cure your arthritis but may help reduce your symptoms. These include:

- Accommodative footwear – footwear with rigid sole or rocker bottom.
- Insoles.
- Joint injections.

If non-surgical treatment does not work, your consultant may recommend you to have surgery to relieve your pain. There are several procedures which may be considered for this condition. The clinical team will discuss these with you along with the benefits of one type of treatment over the other. This leaflet discusses the Cartiva implant.

## What is the Cartiva implant?

Cartiva Synthetic Cartilage Implant is a gel-like implant that is designed to replace the damaged cartilage surface. It is made from polyvinyl alcohol, a material that has been used in a number of medical device applications for more than 20 years. The gel material mimics the quality and density of bone, eliminating the problematic side effects of metal implants, which can damage the bone over time.

## About the operation

The operation can be performed as a day case, so you can go home on the day you have your operation, unless the doctor advises you to stay longer.

You will be given a general anaesthetic (you will be asleep) for the duration of the procedure, which lasts approximately 30 minutes. Your surgeon exposes the big toe joint by making a small (4-5 cm) incision (cut). After removing any bone spurs, a small hole is drilled into the damaged cartilage on the metatarsal head. Next, the Cartiva implant is fitted into the hole. This acts as a joint spacer, decreasing bone-on-bone contact responsible for arthritic pain.

The skin will be closed using stitches and a bulky dressing and bandage will then be placed on your foot for two weeks.

## After the operation

You will spend a short time in the recovery area of the operating theatre, and then you will be taken back to the ward. Your foot will be raised while you are in bed to reduce the swelling that may occur. You will need to continue to keep your leg in a raised position when you are sitting down or lying in bed for at least five days following surgery.

You will be given a special shoe to wear and may begin weight-bearing immediately if you are able. You can start a range of gentle motion exercises immediately to avoid stiffness. You may have some discomfort following the operation so regular painkillers such as Paracetamol or Ibuprofen should be taken to relieve your pain.

Your stitches will be removed at the hospital approximately two weeks after the operation and you may then start using regular wide-fitting shoes. Many patients achieve relief from their arthritis symptoms immediately after the procedure, but normal soft tissue pain or discomfort may continue until four to ten weeks as the wounds heal after surgery.

Further outpatient clinic appointments will be made to check on your progress approximately six weeks and six months after surgery.

## What are the possible risks and complications?

As with all operations complications can occur.

### **General complications following foot surgery include:**

- Infection.
- Swelling and stiffness
- Venous Thromboembolism (VTE) – blood clot.
- Nerve irritation or damage – causing numbness around surgical site or scar sensitivity.

### **Specific complications of this operation include:**

- Lasting or recurrent pain.
- Loosening of implant – causing pain.

The surgeon will discuss the risks involved to you before the operation.

If there is anything you do not understand or if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to discuss them with your doctor or nurse.

## Where should I seek help or advice?

Adult Day Surgery Unit, RBH: 0118 322 7622

Redlands Ward, RBH: 0118 322 7484 / 7485

Any concerns you may have during the first 24 hours following your discharge from hospital please telephone the ward you were on. After 24 hours please contact your GP.

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

RBFT Trauma & Orthopaedics, March 2023. Next review due: March 2025