

# **ARTHROSCOPICALLY ASSISTED ANKLE ARTHRODESIS**

*An Essay*

Submitted for fulfillment of  
Master Degree in Orthopaedic Surgery

By

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# **Abstract**

Ankle arthrodesis is considered to be the “gold standard” treatment for a painful degenerated ankle. Arthroscopic ankle arthrodesis has been shown to be an effective technique to achieve ankle arthrodesis.

Arthroscopic technique is preferable to open techniques for many reasons: limited incisions, less invasive, no periosteal stripping, low risk of infection, low morbidity, shorter time for fusion, shorter hospitalization, earlier weight-bearing and better cosmetic outcome.

## **Keywords:**

- Ankle
- Arthroscopy
- Arthrodesis

# **AIM OF THE WORK**

The aim of this essay is to review the literature and to give an overview of the role of arthroscopy in ankle arthrodesis.

This essay will discuss the gross and arthroscopic anatomy of the ankle joint, biomechanics of the ankle, indications for ankle arthrodesis, setup and instruments for ankle arthroscopy, the surgical technique for arthroscopically assisted ankle arthrodesis and the results of this procedure and its complications.

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# **CONTENTS**

➔ Introduction.	1
➔ Gross & Arthroscopic Anatomy.	5
➔ Biomechanics.	42
➔ Indications for Ankle Arthrodesis.	60
➔ Setup & Instruments for Ankle Arthroscopy.	86
➔ Surgical Technique.	103
➔ Results & Complications.	123
➔ Summary.	149
➔ References.	153
➔ Arabic Summary.	

## **List of figures**

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1</b>	Anterior view of the osseous structures of the right ankle.	7
<b>2</b>	The left talus, inferior and superior surfaces.	8
<b>3</b>	The left talus, medial and lateral surfaces.	9
<b>4</b>	Anatomic–arthroscopic correlation of the synovial fringe at the tibiofibular syndesmosis.	10
<b>5</b>	Anatomic view of the anterior ligaments of the ankle.	11
<b>6</b>	Anterior view, posterior view, and arthroscopic image of the syndesmotic ligaments.	13
<b>7</b>	Sagittal section of the ankle.	13
<b>8</b>	Osteoarticular anatomic dissection of the ligaments of the foot and ankle joint.	15
<b>9</b>	Macrophotography of anatomic dissection of the posterior ligaments of the ankle.	16
<b>10</b>	Arthroscopic image of the posterior ligaments of the ankle through the anterior portal.	17
<b>11</b>	Medial view of the ankle joint ligaments and Frontal section of the ankle joint.	18
<b>12</b>	Left foot, normal anterior view showing the common course of the anterior tibial artery.	20
<b>13</b>	Left foot, anterolateral view showing arterial variation of the course of the anterior tibial artery.	20
<b>14</b>	Left foot, anterolateral view showing arterial variation of the course of the anterior tibial artery.	21
<b>15</b>	Left foot, lateral view showing arterial variation of the course of the anterior tibial artery.	21
<b>16</b>	Anatomy of the superficial peroneal nerve at the ankle joint.	23

<b>17</b>	Types of superficial peroneal nerve divisions at the level of the ankle joint.	24
<b>18</b>	Schematic view of the ankle joint showing the ankle joint capsular recess.	26
<b>19</b>	Cutaneous landmarks of anterior view of the ankle.	27
<b>20</b>	Subcutaneous course of the superficial peroneal nerve.	27
<b>21</b>	Medial view of the ankle and anatomic dissection showing the great saphenous vein.	29
<b>22</b>	Transverse section at the level of the ankle joint.	30
<b>23</b>	Transverse section at the level of the ankle showing the anatomic relationships of the arthroscopic portals.	30
<b>24</b>	Anatomic dissection of the cutaneous nerves at the dorsum of the foot.	32
<b>25</b>	Anatomic dissection showing varying course of the anterior tibial artery.	33
<b>26</b>	Anatomic dissection showing neurovascular relationships of the posterolateral portal.	36
<b>27</b>	Macrophotography of a transverse section at the ankle showing the anatomic relations of the posterior portals.	38
<b>28</b>	The conventional and coaxial posterolateral and posteromedial portals.	39
<b>29</b>	The coaxial posterolateral portal.	40
<b>30</b>	The coaxial posteromedial portal.	40
<b>31</b>	Transmalleolar and transtalar portals for ankle arthroscopy.	41
<b>32</b>	Cardinal axes for the motions of the ankle/foot complex.	43
<b>33</b>	Variations in the frontal axis of the ankle joint and relationships of the ankle axes.	44
<b>34</b>	Surface-velocity diagram that demonstrates changes in surface velocity and instantaneous centers of rotation.	45

<b>35</b>	Individual discrete helical axes of the ankle joint projected on the sagittal, coronal and transverse planes.	46
<b>36</b>	Geometry of the four-bar linkage model in the neutral position of the ankle.	47
<b>37</b>	Shape of the talus articular surface.	47
<b>38</b>	Contact area at the ankle mortise.	56
<b>39</b>	Schematic demonstration of prints on pressure-sensitive film representing high pressure contact areas.	57
<b>40</b>	The traditional nomenclature for describing eight main events emphasizing the cyclic nature of human gait.	59
<b>41</b>	Radiographs of a 36 years old female patient with post-traumatic osteoarthritis.	66
<b>42</b>	AP and lateral radiographs of a rheumatoid arthritis patient who had arthroscopic ankle arthrodesis.	72
<b>43</b>	AP and lateral radiographs of a haemophilic arthritis patient who had arthroscopic ankle arthrodesis.	75
<b>44</b>	Lateral radiograph and CT scan showing ankle joint gout.	77
<b>45</b>	Lateral radiograph showing calcium pyrophosphate dihydrate disease (CPPD) of the hindfoot.	78
<b>46</b>	Postoperative AP and lateral radiographs of arthroscopic ankle arthrodesis using illizarov.	81
<b>47</b>	Good ankle fusion shown on AP and lateral radiographs after removal of the illizarov.	82
<b>48</b>	Lateral radiograph and MRI of the ankle demonstrating neuroarthropathy involving the ankle.	83
<b>49</b>	Picture showing the position of the patient and the thigh holder.	88
<b>50</b>	Arthroscopic setup with noninvasive ankle distractor applied to the prepped and draped lower extremity.	88
<b>51</b>	The thigh is supported in a standard thigh holder, and the leg hanging over the end of the table.	89
<b>52</b>	The leg is draped with the distraction strap and weights attached to the strap.	89



<b>53</b>	The patient placed in a semilateral position.	89
<b>54</b>	The frontal view of the draped leg in the semilateral position.	90
<b>55</b>	Noninvasive distraction technique with the kerlix roll tied around the surgeon's waist.	91
<b>56</b>	Noninvasive distraction with the ankle in the Guhl noninvasive distractor.	92
<b>57</b>	Invasive distraction device placed laterally with pins in the tibia and calcaneus.	93
<b>58</b>	Intraoperative situation after placing two bilateral AO distractors.	95
<b>59</b>	The patient position on the orthopaedic fracture table with calcaneal pin placement.	96
<b>60</b>	Image intensifier view of the ankle before and after the kyphoplasty balloon is inflated.	96
<b>61</b>	A probe for ankle arthroscopy.	100
<b>62</b>	A series of curved and angled open and closed curettes.	101
<b>63</b>	Four styles of grasping tip for loose body removal and tissue excision.	102
<b>64</b>	Pre and post x-rays of a woman with a varus deformity of 18° treated with arthroscopic ankle arthrodesis.	106
<b>65</b>	Pre and post lateral x-rays of the ankle with the 'sagittal plane angle' measured.	106
<b>66</b>	Pre and post x-rays showing the anterior extrusion of the talus reduced with the hindfoot well aligned.	106
<b>67</b>	The three portals used for left ankle arthroscopic arthrodesis.	110
<b>68</b>	Arthroscopic images of the preparation of the talar and tibial surfaces.	112
<b>69</b>	Removal of posterior articular cartilage using angled curette.	114
<b>70</b>	AP and lateral x-rays which showing the screws location in the crossed transmalleolar configuration.	115

<b>71</b>	AP and lateral x-rays showing parallel screws configuration placed from the medial side.	115
<b>72</b>	Pre and post x-rays and intraoperative fluoroscopy showing three-screw fixation configuration.	116
<b>73</b>	Inserting a guide pin for a cannulated screw, starting above the medial malleolus.	117
<b>74</b>	Arthroscopic view of the tips of the guide pins for the cannulated screws.	118
<b>75</b>	Fluoroscopic image showing insertion of the ‘home-run screw’ over a guide wire from posterior to anterior.	118

## **List of tables**

<b>Table</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page no.</b>
1	Comparison of the nomenclature used for the medial collateral ligament components.	18
2	Arthroscopic portals described for the ankle joint.	28
3	Results of published studies comparing fusion rate, time to fusion and usual inpatient stay.	127
4	Mazur et al. ankle grading system.	130
5	The American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society ankle-hindfoot rating scale.	133
6	Complications of ankle arthroscopy.	135
7	Complications related to distraction.	136

# INTRODUCTION

# **INTRODUCTION**

Ankle arthrodesis is a surgical procedure designed to induce bony ankylosis of a diseased ankle joint, and is indicated for treatment of a variety of degenerative and neuromuscular foot disorders. Since 1879, when Albert first published a paper describing ankle arthrodesis, a variety of surgical approaches, resection methods, and fixation techniques have been described for ankle fusion. It has been hypothesized that the wide variety of procedures used to achieve surgical fusion of the ankle may reflect the difficulty in fusing the small contact area between the talus and the tibia, because this interface is subject to high stresses related to the long lever arms of the foot and tibia <sup>1</sup>.

For many years, the most frequent indication for surgical arthrodesis of the foot and ankle was the treatment of flaccid paralysis resulting from a variety of neuromuscular conditions, particularly poliomyelitis. As techniques evolved and the success rates for arthrodeses increased, surgical indications expanded accordingly to post-traumatic osteoarthritis, Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, osteonecrosis, clubfoot deformity, sequelae of posterior tibial tendon dysfunction, diabetic neuropathy, and cerebral palsy <sup>2</sup>.

Arthrodesis of the ankle is a well-established and efficient treatment for painful ankle osteoarthritis. The techniques of open arthrodesis are plagued with complications like wound healing problems, infections and delayed unions, as the procedures require extensive approaches with concomitant soft tissue stripping and interference with blood supply to bone. The use of power tools for sawing and shaving without irrigation leads to more or less marked thermal bone necrosis. The indications for ankle arthroscopy, which was mainly limited to the

removal of the osteochondral lesions, loose bodies, adhesions, and synovectomies, have been extended to arthrodeses since first reported by Schneider in 1983 <sup>3</sup>.

Arthroscopic ankle arthrodesis requires specialized equipment, instruments, and arthroscopic experience, and the procedure may be technically more demanding than open arthrodesis. After arthroscopic ankle debridement and excision of articular cartilage through anteromedial and anterolateral portals, fixation is achieved using two or three cannulated screws placed separately from the tibia and the fibula to the talus. If additional intraoperative or postoperative fixation is required, a Charnley clamp may be used to supplement tibiotalar screw fixation <sup>4</sup>.

Advantages of the arthroscopic technique over open techniques include low postoperative morbidity and absence of limb-threatening complications, less blood loss, shorter hospital stay, faster rehabilitation and mobilization, a low complication rate, and decreased time to union. The arthroscopic technique has the advantage of not compromising the soft-tissue envelope, and it can be done even in patients with both poor skin and wound healing potential which would be a contraindication to the open technique <sup>5</sup>.

The time until fusion and thus the immobilization time is, on average, 4–8 weeks less than with open methods of arthrodesis. This is a distinct advantage in many respects. It allows patients to return to their previous level of independence much more quickly, and it cuts down on the time out of work for those whose jobs require ambulation. The significantly shorter time to fusion is a distinct advantage to certain physically disabled patients, such as those with rheumatoid arthritis, who have difficulty ambulating with upper extremity walking aids.

The reason for the shorter time to fusion is speculative. The most likely basis is that minimal interruption of the soft tissue structures around the ankle preserves the blood supply to the bones and soft tissue envelope. An intact blood supply enhances the fusion process. It is also possible that the original contour of the bony surfaces is better maintained with the arthroscopic technique, given the precise removal of bone using an arthroscopic burr. This may lend added stability to the fusion construct and leave a larger surface area of bony contact, allowing more rapid fusion <sup>6</sup>.

Initially arthroscopic ankle arthrodesis was felt to be an in situ fusion and no, or only minimal deformity could be corrected. With greater experience, increasing deformities have been attempted and currently an upper limit of 10° to 15° deformity is accepted. Ankles with deformities of 25° and greater have been arthroscopically fused based on the pre-operative ability to place the forefoot square to the ground and then dealing with residual hind-foot deformity by means of a calcaneal osteotomy <sup>7</sup>.

The most frequent complications reported with arthroscopically assisted ankle arthrodesis has been nonunion and painful hardware requiring removal. Other major sequelae included delayed union (8–20 months), subtalar pain, subtalar joint penetration, cutaneous nerve injury, infection, malunion, dorsalis pedis pseudoaneurysm and broken drill bit. The rates of these complications are generally not higher than those reported with open techniques <sup>8</sup>.

To avoid complications, care must be given to patient selection, careful preoperative evaluation, including skin, nerve, and vascular status, careful physical examination and radiologic evaluation, thorough knowledge of foot and ankle anatomy and practicing with sawbones and cadaver specimens, meticulous distraction placement, careful portal