

OS27lite Removing Metalwork

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This document will give you information about removing metalwork. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is metalwork used for?

Metalwork includes plates, screws, rods and wires. These are specially made from stainless steel or titanium for operations on bones (see figure 1).

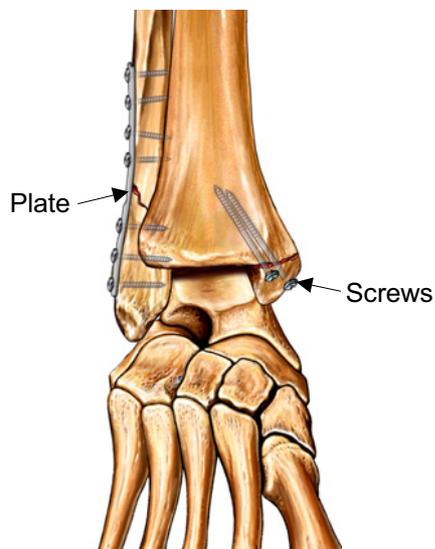


Figure 1
Fractures fixed using a plate and screws

What are the benefits of surgery?

Removing the metalwork can reduce any pain or discomfort and can help treat an infection around the metalwork. It can also prevent the metalwork from disappearing inside the bone if you are still growing.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Pain or discomfort can sometimes be helped by taking painkillers, avoiding pressure over the metalwork and keeping warm when the weather is cold.

If you have an infection around the metalwork, you can sometimes keep it under control by taking antibiotics. However, it is not usually possible to cure an infection without removing the metalwork.

What does the operation involve?

A variety of anaesthetic techniques is possible. The operation usually takes between half an hour and an hour.

Your surgeon will usually remove the metalwork through the same cut used to put it in. Small screws or wires can sometimes be hard to find and your surgeon may need to use an x-ray camera. Even larger pieces can be hard to find and remove if they are covered with scar tissue or bone.

What complications can happen?

1 General complications

- Pain
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Unsightly scarring
- Blood clots
- Difficulty passing urine

2 Specific complications

- Failure to remove all metalwork
- Damage to nerves
- Weakening of the bone
- Severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of the arm or leg (complex regional pain syndrome)

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home the same day or the day after.

For the first week you will need to spend most of the time with your arm or leg raised so that the swelling settles.

It can take six months or longer to recover completely from surgery.

Summary

Metalwork is often used in operations to help bones to heal. Once your bones have healed, your surgeon may recommend removing the metalwork to reduce or prevent any problems it may cause.

Acknowledgements

Author: Mr Stephen Milner DM FRCS (Tr. & Orth.)
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