Name of Policy:
Total Ankle Replacement

Policy #:  339
Category:  Surgery

Latest Review Date:  July 2014
Policy Grade:  Effective July 24, 2014; Active Policy but no longer scheduled for regular literature reviews and updates.

Background/Definitions:
As a general rule, benefits are payable under Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama health plans only in cases of medical necessity and only if services or supplies are not investigational, provided the customer group contracts have such coverage.

The following Association Technology Evaluation Criteria must be met for a service/supply to be considered for coverage:

1. The technology must have final approval from the appropriate government regulatory bodies;
2. The scientific evidence must permit conclusions concerning the effect of the technology on health outcomes;
3. The technology must improve the net health outcome;
4. The technology must be as beneficial as any established alternatives;
5. The improvement must be attainable outside the investigational setting.

Medical Necessity means that health care services (e.g., procedures, treatments, supplies, devices, equipment, facilities or drugs) that a physician, exercising prudent clinical judgment, would provide to a patient for the purpose of preventing, evaluating, diagnosing or treating an illness, injury or disease or its symptoms, and that are:

1. In accordance with generally accepted standards of medical practice; and
2. Clinically appropriate in terms of type, frequency, extent, site and duration and considered effective for the patient’s illness, injury or disease; and
3. Not primarily for the convenience of the patient, physician or other health care provider; and
4. Not more costly than an alternative service or sequence of services at least as likely to produce equivalent therapeutic or diagnostic results as to the diagnosis or treatment of that patient’s illness, injury or disease.
**Description of Procedure or Service:**
A variety of total ankle replacement (TAR) system designs, including fixed-bearing and mobile-bearing, are being investigated for the management of moderate-to-severe tibiotalar pain. TAR (arthroplasty) is being evaluated as an alternative to tibiotalar fusion (arthrodesis) in patients with arthritis.

The ankle joint is a comparatively small joint relative to the weight bearing and torque it must withstand. These factors have made the design of total ankle joint replacements technically challenging. The main alternative to total ankle replacement is arthrodesis. While both procedures are designed to reduce pain, the total ankle replacement is also intended to improve function and reduce stress on adjacent joints. TAR has been investigated since the 1970s, but the procedure was essentially abandoned in the 1980s due to a high long-term failure rate, both in terms of pain control and improved function. Newer models have since been developed, which can be broadly subdivided into two design types, fixed-bearing and mobile-bearing. More than twenty different ankle replacement systems are currently being evaluated worldwide.

Fixed-bearing designs lock the polyethylene component into the baseplate, which provides greater stability but increases constraint and edge-loading stress at the bone implant interface, potentially increasing risk of early loosening and failure. In 2002, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the Agility® Ankle Revision Prosthesis (DePuy Orthopaedics), which is intended for cemented use only in patients with a failed previous ankle surgery. In 2005, the FDA reviewed a 510(k) marketing clearance application for the Topez™ Total Ankle Replacement (Topez Orthopedics, Inc., Boulder, Colorado) and determined that it was substantially equivalent to the existing DePuy Agility device. The Topez Ankle is now called the InBone™ Total Ankle System (Wright Medical Technology, Arlington, TN). This device is also intended for cemented use only. The Agility LP (DePuy Orthopaedics) and the Eclipse (Kinetikos Medical, Carlsbad, CA) received 510(k) marketing clearance in 2006. The SALTO Talaris® (Tornier, Edina, MN) received 510(k) marketing clearance in 2006 and 2009. These semi-constrained cemented prostheses are indicated in patients with end-stage ankle disorders (e.g., affected with severe rheumatoid, post-traumatic, or degenerative arthritis) as an alternative to ankle fusion.

Three-piece mobile-bearing systems have a polyethylene component that is unattached and articulates independently with both the tibial and talar components. The three-piece mobile-bearing prostheses are designed to reduce constraint and edge-loading but are less stable than fixed-bearing designs and have the potential for dislocation and increased wear of the polyethylene component. Mobile-bearing designs are intended for uncemented implantation and have a porous coating on the components to encourage osseointegration. They include the Ankle Evolution System (AES, Biomet, Whippany, NJ), Buechel- Pappas system, HINTEGRA® Total Ankle Prosthesis (New Deal), Mobility™ Total Ankle System (DePuy), Salto Total Ankle Prosthesis (Tornier), Scandinavian Total Ankle Replacement (STAR, Small Bone Innovations, Morrisville, PA), Bologna and Oxford Universities (BOX) Ankle (MAT Ortho), CCI Evolution Ankle (Van Straten), Zenith (Corin) and the TNK ankle (Kyocera Corporation, Kyoto, Japan). Three-component mobile-bearing systems are Class III devices and are considered under a different regulatory pathway (premarket approval) than the fixed component devices described above, which were cleared for marketing under the 510(k)
regulatory pathway. Premarket approval (PMA) requires demonstration of clinical efficacy in FDA-regulated trials conducted under an investigational device exemption (IDE). In May 2009, the FDA approved the STAR ankle as an alternative to fusion for replacing an ankle joint deformed by rheumatoid arthritis, primary arthritis, or post-traumatic arthritis. As a condition of the approval, the device maker must evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the device over the next eight years. The Mobility™ Total Ankle System is currently being evaluated in a FDA-regulated investigational device exemption (IDE) trial. The Ankle Evolution System (AES), Buechel-Pappas, Mobility, Salto Total Ankle, BOX Ankle, CCI Evolution Ankle, Zenith, and the TNK ankle are not currently used in the United States.

Total ankle replacement has been performed in patients with severe rheumatoid arthritis, severe osteoarthritis, or post-traumatic osteoarthrosis.

Policy:
Effective for dates of service on or after November 3, 2009:
Total ankle replacement using an FDA-approved device meets Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama’s medical criteria for coverage in skeletally mature patients with moderate to severe ankle (tibiotalar) pain that limits daily activity and who have the following conditions:

- Arthritis in adjacent joints (i.e., subtalar or midfoot); OR
- Severe arthritis of the contralateral ankle; OR
- Arthrodesis of the contralateral ankle; OR
- Inflammatory (e.g., rheumatoid) arthritis

Absolute contraindications to ankle arthroplasty include any of the following:

- Extensive avascular necrosis of the talar dome;
- Compromised bone stock or soft tissue (including skin and muscle);
- Severe malalignment (e.g., > 15 degrees) not correctable by surgery;
- Active ankle joint infection;
- Peripheral vascular disease;
- Charcot neuroarthropathy.

Relative contraindications to ankle arthroplasty include:

- Peripheral neuropathy;
- Ligamentous instability;
- Subluxation of the talus;
- History of ankle joint infection;
- Presence of severe deformities above or beneath the ankle.

Also, the revision surgery should be considered on a case-by-case basis for reimplantation of a new polyethylene bearing, component, or entire total ankle.

Total ankle replacement does not meet Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama’s medical criteria for coverage and is considered investigational for all other indications.
In general, patients selected for arthroplasty would not be good candidates for arthrodesis due to the presence of bilateral or subtalar arthritis or Chopart arthrosis. Optimal candidates for total ankle replacement are considered to be older (age > 50), thin, low-demand individuals with minimal deformity. Patients should have no functional barriers to participation in a rehabilitation program.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama does not approve or deny procedures, services, testing, or equipment for our members. Our decisions concern coverage only. The decision of whether or not to have a certain test, treatment or procedure is one made between the physician and his/her patient. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama administers benefits based on the member’s contract and corporate medical policies. Physicians should always exercise their best medical judgment in providing the care they feel is most appropriate for their patients. Needed care should not be delayed or refused because of a coverage determination.

Key Points:
The following outcomes are relevant to the analysis of safety and efficacy of total ankle replacement (TAR), compared to ankle arthrodesis, the standard treatment alternative:

- Resolution of pain
- Function of both the ankle and the proximal joint in various activities, such as gait walking on flat or irregular surfaces, or walking up stairs, and return to recreational activities.
- Long-term outcomes, including time to revision, and the development of arthritis in the tarsus, knee, or hip related to strain on adjacent joints.

Numerous reviews have detailed the technical challenges of TAR, which include evolving prosthetic designs, optimizing biomechanics, and surgical complications. A 2008 evidence-based review concluded that the literature on TAR for any prosthesis consists of level IV evidence (case series). No randomized trials comparing arthrodesis to arthroplasty were identified, and two, small, nonrandomized studies had conflicting results. The review indicates that, in general, older, thin, low-demand individuals are considered optimal candidates for TAR, but specific criteria have not been established. Absolute contraindications were listed as extensive avascular necrosis of the talar dome, compromised bone stock or soft tissue, peripheral neuropathy, peripheral vascular disease, and Charcot neuroarthropathy. Ligamentous instability, subluxation of the talus, and presence of severe deformities above or beneath the ankle were listed as relative contraindications to arthroplasty. The authors noted that in 2007, the Canadian Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society launched a multi-center, randomized case-controlled trial comparing the clinical and radiographic outcomes of the two procedures in order to provide evidence for future clinical decision making.

Haddad and colleagues conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of ten studies (including two abstracts) on TAR (852 patients) and 39 studies on ankle arthrodesis (1,262 patients). No studies that directly compared the two procedures were identified. The patients treated with TAR were older (58 vs. 50 years, respectively), and the primary indication was rheumatoid arthritis (39%), whereas post-traumatic arthritis was the primary indication for
arthrodesis (57%). The meta-analysis found similar overall scores for the Ankle-Hindfoot Scale (78 for TAR vs. 76 for arthrodesis) and revision rates (7% vs. 9%, respectively), although these results are limited due to the quality of the included studies, heterogeneity of results, variability in reporting of outcomes of interest, different populations for the two procedures, and different durations of follow-up. Loosening (28%), wear (15%), and dislocation/migration (11%) were the most frequently reported reasons for revision of ankle arthroplasty (n=46), while revision of ankle arthrodesis (n=66) was predominantly due to nonunion (65%) and infection (26%). Conversion from arthroplasty to arthrodesis was reported in 5% of 572 patients. Below-the-knee amputations were reported in one of 126 (0.8%) patients who had an ankle replacement and 12 of 242 (5%) patients who had undergone ankle fusion.

SooHoo and colleagues conducted a review of California's hospital discharge database to compare short- and long-term outcomes of patients who had undergone TAR (n=480) or ankle arthrodesis (n=4,705) during a ten-year period (1995-2004). The type of prosthesis was not specified. At 90 days, there were more device-related complications (hazard ratio [HR]: 2.68) and major revisions (HR: 3.65) in the TAR group in comparison with those who had undergone arthrodesis. For example, there were six (1%) major revision procedures by 90 days in the TAR group, including three revision arthroplasties, two implant removals, and two ankle fusions. In comparison, additional fusion was performed in 16 (0.35%) of the ankle arthrodesis patients. At five years after surgery, major revision rates were 23% for TAR and 11% for arthrodesis (HR: 1.93), with reduced survival rates according Kaplan-Meier analysis. There was a 2% lower rate of subtalar fusion following TAR compared with ankle arthrodesis (0.7% vs. 2.8%, HR: 0.28). Patients treated with ankle fusion were more likely to have lower median income and safety-net insurance, complicated diabetes, and osteonecrosis, whereas patients with ankle replacement were more likely to have rheumatoid arthritis.

A comparison of complications between TAR and arthrodesis was reported by Krause et al. in 2011. From February 2002 through August 2007, data collected from 516 patients following TAR or ankle arthrodesis were entered into the database. Indications for ankle arthrodesis were severe deformity and instability, poor ankle motion, no or mild adjacent joint arthritis, and younger age. Indications for TAR were older age, severe adjacent joint arthritis, a diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis, and no or only mild deformity or instability. Patient preference was also a factor. A total of 114 TARs and 47 ankle fusions met the inclusion criteria for the study, with a complete data set and minimum two-year follow-up. Sixty-one of the TARs were performed with the fixed-bearing Agility prosthesis, while the remaining 53 were performed with one of three types of mobile-bearing prostheses (HINTEGRA, STAR, and Mobility). The mean age was 64 years for the patients who underwent TAR and 59 years for the patients who underwent arthrodesis. The validated self-administered Ankle Osteoarthritis Scale (AOS) was used to evaluate all patients at six, 12, and 24 months and 3.5, 5, and ten years postoperatively. Radiographic evaluations were performed at a mean of 39 months following TAR and 37 months following arthrodesis. Both groups had significant improvement in the validated AOS (30.9 points for TAR and 30.6 for arthrodesis, p<0.001 for pre-/post-comparison). There were significantly more complications following TAR than ankle arthrodesis (54% vs. 21%, respectively, p=0.003). Aseptic loosening occurred in 17 (15%) of the 114 TARs, and 11 of these had revision surgery. A technical error occurred in 17 (15%) of the TARs, which included lateral gutter impingement, excessive polyethylene wear or breakage, and malalignment. There were
eight (7%) intraoperative fractures, which were treated during the index operation, and seven cases (6%) of deep infection. The highest rate of complications were reported for the Agility prosthesis (61%), followed by the Mobility (47%), the STAR (44%), and the HINTEGRA (18%). Complications in patients treated with arthrodesis included adjacent joint arthritis (6%), non-union (4%), and technical error (2%). Other complications (9%) included medial-gutter-related discomfort and nonspecific ongoing pain. For both groups, there was a significant impact of major complications on the AOS outcome score. The comparison of adverse rates between groups is limited by differences in the patient populations selected for each procedure.

Schuh et al in 2011 retrospectively compared 21 patients receiving ankle arthrodesis with twenty patients receiving TAR on the outcome of percent of patients participating in sports and recreational activities. At an average of 34.5 months after surgery, there was no significant difference between TAR and arthrodesis in activity levels as measured by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) activity scale (6.8 vs. 7.0), participation in sports activities (76% vs. 75%), or the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society (AOFAS) hindfoot score (75.6 vs. 75.6).

Prospective controlled trials directly comparing TAR with the established alternative of fusion are lacking. Therefore, relevant publications reporting outcomes of ankle arthrodesis and ankle arthroplasty are reviewed below.

**Ankle Arthrodesis**

Coester et al reported 22-year follow-up with clinical and radiologic evaluation on 23 patients who had ankle arthrodesis for the treatment of painful post-traumatic arthritis of the ankle. A chart review of arthrodesis procedures at the author’s institution identified 64 patients who met the inclusion/exclusion criteria of isolated ankle arthrodesis, 48 (75%) of whom were located. Thirteen of these 48 patients had died, four (8%) had a below-the-knee amputation, two (4%) had an additional midfoot arthrodesis, and six (13%) declined to participate, resulting in 23 patients included in the follow-up evaluation (range, 12–44 years). The mean age of the study group at the time of the operation was 41 years (range, 12–70 years), and 64 years (range, 38-89 years) at follow-up. Twenty-two (96%) of the patients demonstrated a slight-to-moderate limp on clinical evaluation, with no range of motion (ROM) present in 39% and motion less than half the range of the contralateral side in 57%. Eleven patients (48%) had tenderness and swelling in the hindfoot and nine (39%) in the midfoot. Six patients (26%) used a cane and two (9%) used a walker or other assistance for support. Self-reported questionnaire results indicated more foot pain (38 vs. 11 points, respectively), foot disability (47 vs. 15 points, respectively), and more severe activity limitation on the ipsilateral than contralateral side (27 vs. 10 points, respectively). Twenty-three patients (96%) reported limitations in vigorous activities, and 20 patients (83%) reported difficulty walking more than one mile. For the uninvolved ankle, most of the patients (87%) had full and painless motion. Pain did not differ significantly between the ipsilateral and contralateral knee. Radiographic evaluation of other joints showed more degeneration in the ipsilateral than the contralateral foot. For example, 21 patients had moderate or severe osteoarthritis in the ipsilateral but not the contralateral subtalar joint and 13 patients had moderate or severe osteoarthritis in the ipsilateral but not the contralateral talonavicular joint. No differences were found in the level of osteoarthritis in the ipsilateral and contralateral knees.
effects of ankle fusion on other joints of the foot may be underestimated in this study due to the exclusion of patients who underwent additional procedures.

Buchner and Sabo evaluated long-term outcomes of 48 patients at an average nine years after ankle arthrodesis. From a cohort of 60 patients who underwent fusion between 1979 and 1997, seven patients were excluded, three died, and two were lost to follow-up, leaving 45 patients who had clinical and radiologic evaluation and three patients who responded to questionnaires only. The average age of the patients at the time of surgery was 51 years (range: 20–74 years). Before surgery, 34 patients (71%) reported severe pain that was almost always present, 12 (25%) reported moderate daily pain and two (4%) had mild occasional pain. At follow-up, ten (21%) patients reported moderate-to-severe pain, and 38 (79%) reported mild-to-no pain. The visual analog scale (VAS) for pain improved from an average of 8.8 before surgery to 3.0 at follow-up. Nine patients (19%) had revision surgery due to infection (n=4), non-union (n=4), and malposition (n=1). Clinical evaluation at nine years (range: 3–21 years) revealed that four patients (8%) had a marked gait abnormality and limp, 26 (54%) had some gait abnormality, and 18 patients (38%) had no abnormality while walking. The average postoperative score on the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society (AOFAS) ankle and hindfoot scale was 74 out of 100. Thirty-four patients (73%) scored as good-to-excellent, and 13 (27%) as fair-to-poor. Arthrosis in the subtalar joint was severe in four, moderate in 17, and mild in 17. The average tarsal mobility of the surgically treated foot was 54% of the contralateral side, and restriction of tarsal mobility was correlated with worse clinical outcome.

Another study reported average seven-year follow-up (range: 2–15 years) on 42 patients who underwent arthrodesis for primary or secondary osteoarthritis of the ankle. Of 48 patients treated between 1979 and 1995, three patients died, and three did not return for the clinical evaluation or radiography, resulting in 88% follow-up. The average age of the patients at the time of surgery was 58 years (range: 25–79 years). The clinical score improved from 54 to 78 points (out of 100), with the pain subscore improving from 18 to 35 (out of 40). No association was found between postoperative pain and ROM. Non-union was detected in three ankles (7%). Degenerative arthritis developed and advanced in the subtalar joint in 33% of the patients. The severity of arthritis in the subtalar and Chopart joints was exacerbated if patients had arthritis before surgery. Based on these findings, the authors concluded that a treatment method that allows mobility of the ankle, such as total ankle arthroplasty, is indicated for patients in whom degenerative changes are detected in adjoining joints before surgery.

The literature indicates that treatment of a painful arthritic joint with arthrodesis can significantly reduce pain. However, non-union and malposition may require additional surgery, and as many as 5% of patients have been reported to choose amputation due to continuing pain or loss of function. With longer-term follow-up, increasing foot pain and degenerative changes in adjoining joints have been observed. These longer-term changes are associated with reduced ROM in the fused ankle joint and have been shown to be most severe in patients with pre-existing osteoarthritis of the subtalar joint.

**Total Ankle Replacement**

Gougoulias and colleagues published a 2010 systematic review on outcomes from ankle replacement. Thirteen case series studies were published between 2003 and 2008 that included
at least twenty subjects and had at least two years of follow-up. The studies included a total of 1,105 total ankle replacements (TARs) (including 234 Agility, 344 STAR, 153 Buechel-Pappas, 152 HINTEGRA, 70 TNK, and 54 Mobility). The failure rate, with revision, arthrodesis, or amputation as an endpoint, was 9.8%, with a weighted follow-up of 5.2 years. The available evidence was insufficient to determine superiority of any implant design over another. Studies of fixed-bearing and mobile-bearing devices are described below.

**Fixed-Bearing Total Ankle Replacement**

Roukis reported a systematic review of articles published between 1998 and 2011 in which the Agility TAR was used. Included were fourteen studies (2,312 ankles) that had a mean follow-up of twelve months or longer, and had details of the revisions performed. Reasons for revisions were aseptic loosening, ballooning osteolysis, cystic changes, malalignment, or instability. The methodologic quality of the included studies was considered generally poor. At a weighted mean follow-up of 22.8 months, 224 (9.7%) had undergone revision, of which 182 (81.3%) underwent implant component replacement, 34 (15.2%) underwent arthrodesis, and eight (3.6%) underwent below-knee amputation. No significant effect from the surgeon's learning curve on the incidence of revision or the type of revision surgery performed was identified. Causes of revision included malalignment, subsidence, migration, aseptic loosening/osteolysis, instability of the talar component, and "undersizing" the implant components. The conclusions of this systematic review are limited by the poor quality of the individual studies and the short follow-up.

One of the studies included in the systematic review was by Spirt and colleagues reporting outcomes from 306 consecutive TARs (303 patients) with the Agility Ankle system performed between 1995 and 2001. The majority of the patients had post-traumatic osteoarthrosis (65%) or primary osteoarthrosis (25%) and had an average age of 54 years (range, 19-85 years). Loosening of the talar component was observed in 22 joints (7%). At an average 33 months’ follow-up, 40% of cases had required reoperation, and 33 TARs (11%) were considered to have failed. The five-year implant survival rate was 80%. Age at the time of the primary total ankle arthroplasty was the only covariate related to the rate of reoperation and failure, with each one-year increase in age associated with a 3.5% decrease in the hazard of failure. Another case series of 100 consecutive total ankle replacements with the Agility Ankle, implanted between 1984 and 1993, reported follow-up of two to twelve years. Patients were evaluated with an interview focusing on pain and activities of daily living, and clinical and radiologic examination. Of the 85 ankles in 83 patients that were available for follow-up, 98% were associated with some level of pain relief. A total of 74% of patients reported an increase in their functional level. Based on radiologic exam, 36% of prostheses were associated with a delayed union or nonunion. Migration of talar or tibial components of the prosthesis were also noted; migration of the tibial component was associated with nonunion. Nonunion was associated with ballooning lysis at the interface between the bone and tibial component, although lysis was also seen in cases when a solid union was present. The authors conclude that these intermediate results are encouraging, although the radiographic findings created concerns about long-term outcomes. Another case series of 86 cases has been published and reported similar results. While 79 of the 86 cases (92%) reported a favorable outcome, there were similar radiographic findings. A total of 22% of prosthetic components had migrated, and eight of the twelve tibial components that had migrated involved a delayed union or nonunion. Kopp and colleagues reported minimum two-year follow-up (range: 26 to 64 months) on 43 consecutive ankle replacements with the Agility prosthesis;
two patients were lost to follow-up and one patient required revision due to aseptic loosening. Pain was reported to have improved in all patients, rated postoperatively as “none” in 16 patients, “mild, occasional” in 21 patients, and “moderate, daily” in three patients. Twelve perioperative and twelve postoperative complications occurred (60%), requiring additional operative procedures. The authors note that the high rate of complications and need for re-operation is consistent with other reports on the Agility prosthesis, but most of the complications can be adequately treated. Radiolucency or lysis was noted at follow-up in 34 of 40 ankles, and migration or subsidence of components was noted in 18. The authors concluded that, “the overall intermediate-term clinical results of total ankle replacement using the Agility prosthesis are promising, but the longevity of the prosthesis is questionable because of the frequency of periprosthetic lucency, lysis, and component subsidence.” In other case series, failure rates for the Agility prosthesis have been reported to range from 10.6% at 108 months to 32.3% at 40 months.

In 2009, Jensen and Linde reported follow-up of up to 23 years for 26 patients (33 ankles) with rheumatoid arthritis who had received a TAR between 1980 and 1993. The median age of the patients was 60.5 years (range: 31 to 75 years) at the time of surgery. At the latest follow-up, prostheses in four patients had been removed (15%, 4-13 years after implantation); two patients with three prostheses were alive at 23 years after surgery. Two patients had received amputation due to unrelated causes, and the remaining 18 patients had died with the prosthesis in place (median 9.5 years after TAR, range: 0.5 to 23.3 years). Survival based on radiographic loosening was 64% at ten years, while the prosthesis survival rate was 85% at ten years.

Mobile-Bearing Total Ankle Replacement
The STAR prosthesis received final FDA approval in 2009. The pivotal trial for the STAR prosthesis, reported to the FDA in 2007, was a two-year non-inferiority design with 158 patients from ten sites treated with arthroplasty and 66 patients from five additional sites treated with arthrodesis. Results from this trial, and from 435 patients enrolled in the FDA-regulated, multicenter, continued-access registry, were published in 2009. Patients were included if they had primary ankle arthritis, post-traumatic arthritis, or rheumatoid arthritis, moderate-to-severe pain (Buechhal-Pappas pain score of 20 or less), loss of mobility and function (total Buechhal-Pappas score of less than 50 out of 100), and a minimum of six months of conservative treatment including a three-month trial of orthosis and/or analgesic medication. Exclusion criteria included hindfoot or forefoot malalignment, avascular necrosis, severe osteopenia or inadequate bone stock, insufficient ligament support, neuropathy, or neuromuscular impairment. There were no differences between groups in the operative time, estimated blood loss, or length of stay. In the STAR arm, 142 patients (90%) completed the 24-month follow-up; three patients died, and two were transferred to a bilateral treatment study. Only 78% completed 24-month follow-up in the arthrodesis arm due to non-compliance by patients and investigators. The average total Buechhal-Pappas score increased from 41 to 82 in the STAR group and from 43 to 70 in the arthrodesis arm, achieving non-inferiority for this outcome. Statistical superiority was driven primarily by the improvement in ROM, with slight improvements in deformity (increased by 1.9 vs. 0.4 for arthrodesis) and function (increased by 13.4 vs. 9.7 for arthrodesis). Safety success was achieved in fewer STAR patients (71%) than arthrodesis patients (83%). Major adverse events were reported in 9% of STAR patients and 1.5% of controls. Implant-related adverse events included bone fracture (18%), bony changes (8%), nerve injury (20%), soft tissue edema (16%) decreased
ROM (6%), and wound problems (20%). Pain adverse events were similar in the two groups (44% for STAR and 49% for arthrodesis). Surgical instrumentation and technique were modified during the study to address the wound problems and sensory loss from damage to a branch of the peroneal nerve. In the continued access study, there was a 5.3% major complication rate (wound problems, infection, bone problems), one ankle replacement resulted in a below knee amputation due to infection, and 98 of 435 patients (22.5%) had perioperative nerve injury. At 24-month follow-up, 37 patients (8.5%) in the continued access group required revision, removal, or other intervention (compared to 16.5% in the pivotal STAR group and 10.6% in the pivotal fusion group). As in the pivotal trial, efficacy (76%, with equal to or greater than 40-point improvement in the Buechal-Pappas score) was driven primarily by the improvement in ROM.

Wood et al reported mid-term outcomes from 200 patients who had been randomized to receive one of two mobile-bearing ankle replacement systems (STAR or Buechal-Pappas) between 2000 and 2003. The mean follow-up (date last seen for surviving ankles or for failure) was 49 months, with a range of one to 85 months. At the time of follow-up, 163 implants had survived, 21 patients had died, and 16 (8%) implants had failed (twelve Buechal-Pappas and four STAR). These were treated with fusion (n=14) or revision (n=2). There was a trend toward higher failure with the Buechal-Pappas ankle compared to the STAR (p=0.09), with a hazard ratio of 2.7. The presence of a varus or valgus deformity before surgery was associated with failure for either prosthesis, with a hazard ratio of 1.64 for every five-degree increment in deformity. Edge-loading was observed in twelve Buechal-Pappas and six STAR prostheses, 39% of which were subsequently revised. A patient who had a varus or valgus deformity of 15 degrees or more had a 6.5 greater likelihood of developing edge-loading than if the ankle was well-aligned before surgery. Pain and function, measured by the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society (AOFAS) hindfoot score, improved to a similar extent in the two groups. The study found that few patients (less than 20%) had marked increases (10 degrees or more) in range of ankle movement with either prosthesis. Results were not compared with arthrodesis.

In 2011, Zhao et al. reported five- to ten-year survival outcomes in a meta-analysis of 16 studies with 2,088 STAR ankle replacements. At a mean follow-up of 52 months, the pooled rate of failure was 11.1%; 41% of these failures occurred within one year of initial operation. The pooled mean five-year survival rate (10 studies) was 85.9%, and the pooled mean ten-year survival rate (five studies) was 71.1%. The major reasons for implant failure were aseptic loosening and malalignment.

One of the studies included in the systematic review was a consecutive series of 200 implants (184 patients) with the STAR prosthesis reported by Wood and colleagues. The cumulative five-year survival rate was 93%, and the ten-year survival rate was 80%. Twenty-four ankles (12%) failed at a mean of 48 months (range: 1 to 108). The authors suggested that survivorship figures are similar to those of early reports of total knee replacement when techniques and designs were being developed.

Other observational studies report the probability of STAR implant survival to range between 70% and 90% at ten years. Survival of the first generation single-coated STAR prosthesis (used until 1999) was found to be significantly lower than survival of the double-coated STAR prosthesis. In one study, survival of the first generation single-coated STAR prosthesis was
reported to be 70.7% at ten years and 45.6% at 14 years. Women younger than age 60 years with osteoarthritis or post-traumatic arthritis have been shown to have a higher risk for revision than women older than 60 years. Another study that used a two-component device before 1985 and a three-component device from 1986 to 1997 found that survival at 15 years was 75% in patients younger than 50 years and 81% for patients 50 or older, although this difference was not significant.

Quality of life, function, and pain were prospectively evaluated in 82 consecutive patients who had received a STAR prosthesis. Patients were evaluated pre- and post-operatively by the same surgeon, with a mean follow-up of 61 months (range, 24 to 108 months). Significant improvement between preoperative and last follow-up were found in all outcome categories, including visual analog scale (VAS) for pain, the Short Form-36 (SF-36) quality-of-life scale, the AOFAS hindfoot scale, the Buechel-Pappas pain and function scores, and ankle range of motion.

Short- to mid-term follow-up from large case series have been reported for the three-component mobile-bearing Salto, Mobility and BOX prostheses. Two smaller case series have reported a high rate of osteolysis with the Ankle Evolutive System (AES) total ankle in mid-term follow-up. Outside of an investigational device exemption (FDA-regulated) trial for the Mobility total ankle system these devices are not available for use in the U.S. Mid-term survival (8-12 years) of the Buechel-Pappas TAR has been reported to range from 84% to 93%. The Buechel-Pappas TAR system is no longer available for use in the U.S.

Although total ankle systems are continuing to evolve, and long-term evidence is limited, short-term results suggest similar improvements in pain and function in comparison with arthrodesis. Mid-term results indicate 70% survival with first-generation mobile-bearing TAR and up to 90% survival at 8-12 years with second-generation devices.

Summary
The established standard for the painful arthritic ankle is fusion, which usually results in a pain-free but rigid ankle in the short term. Complications associated with ankle fusion are non-union, an increase in arthrosis, and pain in adjoining joints, and not uncommonly, amputation. For specific conditions, including presence of bilateral, subtalar or midfoot arthritis, fusion is not indicated. Therefore, in the absence of an established alternative for specific conditions, total ankle replacement may be considered medically necessary when those specified conditions are met.

Practice Guidelines and Position Statements
American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society (AOFAS)
In 2009, the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society (AOFAS) issued the following position statement on total ankle arthroplasty: “Over the past decade, total ankle replacement surgery has evolved as an acceptable and viable alternative to ankle arthrodesis in select patients with ankle arthritis. These include adult patients with primary, post-traumatic, and rheumatoid arthritis who have moderate or severe pain, loss of mobility, and loss of function of the involved ankle. Before considering total ankle replacement, patients should have completed several months of conservative treatment, should have satisfactory vascular perfusion in the involved extremity, and must have adequate soft-tissue coverage about the ankle that affords a safe
surgical approach to total ankle replacement. In such patients, high-level evidence indicates that total ankle replacement safely relieves pain and may provide superior functional results when compared to ankle fusion. Additional concomitant or sequential surgical procedures may be required in some patients to optimize outcome.”

_American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS)_

AAOS published a 2010 technology overview of surgical treatment options for patients with ankle arthritis in whom nonoperative treatment has failed. The report concluded that based on low- and very low-quality evidence, treatment of ankle arthritis with either a Generation 2 or Generation 3 total ankle arthroplasty results in an improvement in pain and function. The literature does not conclusively demonstrate predictors of better or worse patient-oriented outcomes (e.g., device failure, reoperation, pain relief, patient satisfaction, walking ability) for total ankle arthroplasty.

Additionally, the report concluded that there is limited data from multiple studies directly comparing the efficacy of total ankle arthroplasty to arthrodesis in patients with arthritis. The disparate preoperative ankle function scores and demographic characteristics between the groups enrolled in the relevant comparative studies prohibit meaningful comparisons and confound the interpretation of the data. Analysis of adverse events that corrected for preoperative differences in patients characteristics, provide conflicting results.

_American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons (ACFAS)_

An ACFAS 2010 position statement on total ankle replacement states that “in the United States, total ankle replacement surgery is currently a safe and effective treatment option for select patients with end-stage ankle arthritis. Studies have shown that total ankle replacement surgery improves patient function, reduces pain, and promotes improved quality-of-life.”

_National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)_

NICE considers total ankle replacement surgery standard clinical practice with an efficacy and safety profile that is sufficiently well-known.

**Key Words:**
Agility ankle, ankle replacement, total ankle arthroplasty, ankle, total ankle replacement, ankle arthrodesis

**Approved by Governing Bodies:**
2002—Agility Ankle Revison Prosthesis  
2005—Topez TAR  
2006—Agility LP, Eclipse, SALTO Talaris  
2009—Scandinavian Total Ankle Replacement (STAR) System
**Benefit Application:**
Coverage is subject to member’s specific benefits. Group specific policy will supersede this policy when applicable.

ITS: Home Policy provisions apply
FEP: Special benefit consideration may apply. Refer to member’s benefit plan. FEP does not consider investigational if FDA approved and will be reviewed for medical necessity.

**Current Coding:**
CPT Codes:  
27702  Arthroplasty, ankle; with implant (total ankle)  
27703  Arthroplasty, ankle; revision, total ankle

**References:**
1. Agility-Ankle Revision Prosthesis 510(k) Summary.  
3. American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons (ACFAS). 2010. Available online at:  

**Policy History:**
Medical Policy Group, January 2009 (3)
Medical Policy Administration Committee, February 2009
Medical Policy Group, April 2009
Medical Policy Group, September 2009 (3)
Medical Policy Administration Committee, September 2009
Available for comment September 18-November 2, 2009
Medical Policy Group, November 2009 (3)
Medical Policy Administration Committee, November 2009
Medical Policy Group, October 2010
Medical Policy Group, October 2011; (3): Updated Description, Key Points & References
Medical Policy Group, April 2012 (2): 2012 Update-updated Key Points and References
Medical Policy Group, November 2012 (3): Additional 2012 Update to Description, Key Points and References
Medical Policy Panel, August 2013
Medical Policy Group, August 2013 (3): 2013 Updated to Description, Key Points and References; no change in policy statement
Medical Policy Group, October 2013 (3): Removed ICD-9 Procedure codes; no change in policy statement.
Medical Policy Panel, July 2014
Medical Policy Group, July 2014 (3): 2014 Updates to Description & References; no change in policy statement.

*This medical policy is not an authorization, certification, explanation of benefits, or a contract. Eligibility and benefits are determined on a case-by-case basis according to the terms of the member’s plan in effect as of the date services are rendered. All medical policies are based on (i) research of current medical literature and (ii) review of common medical practices in the treatment and diagnosis of disease as of the date hereof. Physicians and other providers are solely responsible for all aspects of medical care and treatment, including the type, quality, and levels of care and treatment.*

*This policy is intended to be used for adjudication of claims (including pre-admission certification, pre-determinations, and pre-procedure review) in Blue Cross and Blue Shield’s administration of plan contracts.*