

# Area Physicians Using New Device to Fix Flat Feet



**Nirenberg (right) is holding the instrument to insert the flat foot implant. Dr. Carroll (left) is holding the actual flat foot implant.**

Drs. Michael Nirenberg and Michael Carroll, Merrillville foot and ankle surgeons, are now creating arches in people with flat feet with the use of a tiny titanium plug. The plug is made of softly threaded titanium and is placed in the foot through a small one-inch incision.

"Flat feet cause kinds problems," says Dr. Nirenberg. "Without a good arch many patients develop tired or painful feet. And some even get ankle, knee hip or back pain. Some patients come in here with muscle cramps in the calf or ankle." Dr. Carroll adds, "Some children with flat feet will stumble or fall, or just seem very clumsy." Drs. Nirenberg and Carroll went on to explain that many painful foot problems occur because the patient has flat feet. Some of these problems include heel spurs and plantar fasciitis, bunions, hammertoes, corns, callouses, tendonitis, nerve pain and even tendon tears.

The titanium plug is called the MBA Subtalar implant. It is for patients with a specific type of flat foot where the deformity resides in the subtalar joint, a joint located in the heel bones. The titanium plug is only used in those patients who have not responded to conservative care, such as shoe adjustments or custom-made foot orthotics. The plug is placed in the foot without any cutting of bones or drilling,

and if need be it is completely reversible. "I have never had to remove on," Dr. Nirenberg says. "But it is nice to have that option."

Placing the plug in the foot takes approximately thirty minutes and it can be done on adults or children. The titanium plug is not for everyone. The patient must have a flat foot that is flexible or reducible, explained Dr. Carroll. "We need to take x-rays of the foot and evaluate it carefully." Patients with severe arthritis often have rigid flat feet and they would not be suitable for the titanium plug.

The titanium plug is typically left in the foot forever and does not need to be removed. Because the incision is so small and there is not cutting of the bone, patients generally heal up quickly and without complications. The plug restores the foot's arch by preventing the foot from rolling inward. The body's tissues grow normally around the plug and aid in holding it in place. "There is no need for screws or bone cement," Dr. Carroll says. "The patient's own body holds it in place."

"In the past people with flat feet had to have large surgical procedures done or just live with the pain," says Dr. Nirenberg. "This is a real breakthrough." Drs. Nirenberg and Carroll can be reached at their office, Friendly Foot Care, at (219) 769-4601.