



# Ankle Fracture

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University of  
Pittsburgh  
Medical Center  
Information  
for Patients

## What is a fracture?

A fracture (FRACK-cher) is a broken bone. When one or more bones of your ankle joint are broken, you have an ankle fracture. A fracture can happen in several ways. A fall can twist the ankle and cause a fracture. A forceful blow to the lower leg or ankle area can also cause a fracture. Your ankle and foot may become bruised and swollen.

## Types of ankle fracture

### *Non-displaced fracture*

When the broken bone or bones stay in their normal position, you have a **non-displaced fracture**. This type of ankle fracture can usually be treated by putting a cast or splint on the broken ankle. You wear the cast or splint until the fracture heals.

You may need to walk with crutches or a walker until the fracture heals. Your doctor and physical therapist will tell you how much weight, if any, you can put on your broken ankle.

For the first 2 to 3 days after the splint or cast is put on, keep your leg raised above the level of your heart as often as possible. It is **very important** to keep your leg raised. After 2 or 3 days, if your ankle or foot becomes swollen, keep your leg raised as often as possible.

### *Displaced fracture*

When the broken bone or bones are knocked out of normal position, you have a **displaced fracture**. In this type of fracture, the broken bones must be brought back into their normal position. This is called **reduction** (ree-DUCK-shun).

If the fracture is not too severe, your doctor may be able to line up the bones properly without surgery. No incision is made. This is called a **closed reduction**. Sometimes a closed reduction is done in a hospital's Operating Room or in the Emergency Department.

In some cases, surgery is needed to line up the bones properly. This is called an **open reduction** because an incision is made. Your doctor also may need to use pins, screws, or a plate to keep the bones in the right position.

You will wear a splint or cast to keep the bones lined up until the fracture heals. You also will need to walk with crutches or a walker until the fracture heals. You may not be allowed to put any weight on your broken ankle. Or you may be allowed to put some weight on your ankle. Your doctor and physical therapist will tell you how much weight, if any, you can put on your broken ankle.

For the first 2 to 3 days after the splint or cast is put on, keep your leg raised above the level of your heart as often as possible. It is **very important** to keep your leg raised. After 2 or 3 days, if your ankle or foot becomes swollen, keep your leg raised as often as possible.

## **When to call the doctor**

If you have any of the following, call your doctor:

- increased pain, pressure, or swelling that is not relieved by raising your injured leg above heart level
- burning, numbness, or tingling in the toes or foot of the injured leg
- cooler feeling in the toes of the injured leg than in the toes of the other leg
- change of color in the toes of the injured leg (other than bruising)
- drainage from your cast that has a bad odor
- fever of 101° F (38.3° C) or higher
- chills



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For help in finding a doctor or health service that suits your needs, call the UPMC Referral Service at 412-647-UPMC (8762) or 1-800-533-UPMC (8762).

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