

DESCRIPTION

A break in a bone often caused by a fall. Several different types of fractures exist, the divisions depending on the severity. A complete fracture means the bone is broken all the way through. An incomplete fracture means the bone is cracked. An open, or compound, fracture means the fractured bone sticks out through the skin.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain, swelling, or tenderness near the fracture site.
- Paleness and deformity (sometimes).
- Bleeding or bruising at the site.
- Weakness and unable to bear weight.
- Numbness, tingling, or paralysis below the fracture (rare; this is an emergency).

TREATMENT

The Urgent Care or ER physician will usually treat the fracture by placing it in a splint to immobilize the area (Keep the area from moving). You will then likely be referred to an Orthopedist for follow-up. The Orthopedist will determine if any additional measures, such as casting or surgery, are needed.

R.I.C.E. THERAPY

Rest: Restrict use of the injured body part.

Ice: Apply ice packs to the area for approximately 20 minutes, at least four times a day.
Do Not apply ice directly to the skin.

Compression: Use an Ace wrap, splint or cast to reduce swelling.
Take care not to wrap the area so tightly that circulation is restricted. Signs of decreased circulation include numbness, tingling, pale or cool skin and increased pain.
To check circulation, press the finger or toe nails; when pressed the nail will turn white. When the pressure is released the nail should resume its normal pink color within 2 or 3 seconds. If the splint or Ace wrap seem too tight, loosen the wrap and see if symptoms resolve.

Elevation: Use a sling or propped up the area as often as possible.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Usually curable with treatment although healing times may vary.
- Recovery is complete when there is no bone motion at the fracture site, and x-rays show complete healing.

MEDICATIONS

Anti-inflammatory medications, such as ibuprofen or naproxen, pain relievers like acetaminophen, or muscle relaxants may be used in treatment. The physician may also prescribe a narcotic pain reliever if pain is severe.

ACTIVITY

After the splint or cast has been removed:

- Immobility of a bone for a long period of time can cause loss of muscle mass, stiffness in nearby joints, and edema (excess fluid in the tissues). It is important to begin to use the affected part as soon as is safely possible.
- Physical therapy may be prescribed to maintain flexibility of the joint and provide strength to the muscles.
- Resume normal activities as soon as symptoms improve and your health care provider advises you to.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Failure to heal (non-union).
- Fat Embolism (occurs when a clump of fat cells travels from the injury site to the lungs or brain)
- Injury to surrounding nerves or blood vessels.
- Persistent pain in the area of fracture.
- Blood clot in the legs or lungs.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF THE FOLLOWING OCCUR AFTER TREATMENT:

- Severe, persistent pain.
- Skin that is cool or cold, pale or numb.
- Numbness or loss of feeling below the fracture site.
- New or unexplained swelling.
- Report any of these signs immediately!