

Common Foot & Ankle Problems



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TENDONITIS

Tendonitis of the foot and ankle is most commonly caused by either direct trauma or overuse. Other less common causes of tendonitis are infection and inflammatory disorders. The most common tendons involved and affected by tendonitis include the posterior tibial tendon, Achilles tendon, peroneal tendons, and in dancers, the flexor hallucis longus tendon. The initial traumatic injury or a chronic progressive inflammatory process may eventually lead to tendon rupture.

Most tendonitis, about the foot and ankle, will respond to conservative management. In the acute phase, activity modification, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, and immobilization might help with pain resolution. If symptoms will allow, physical therapy is often a great benefit. As a last resort, surgery can be offered to those patients whose tendonitis does not resolve with conservative measures. Steroid injections have also been used in the acute phase; however, care must be taken as to not repeat these injections too frequently as tendon rupture following the steroid injections have been reported. Achilles tendonitis is most often caused by overuse and usually responds to non-operative means. Peroneal tendonitis is usually the result of trauma to the tendon or fractures in the area of these tendons. Posterior tibial tendonitis can be caused by either a traumatic event or overuse or perhaps a result of degenerative change. If left untreated, posterior tibial tendonitis may lead to a flat foot, which could require a major reconstructive procedure.

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ANKLE SPRAINS

Ligamentous injuries of the ankle are the most common athletic injury. The typical ankle sprain involves the ligaments on the outside of the ankle. Mild sprains of the ankle are treated with ice, elevation, and non-weight bearing during the acute phase. When the symptoms begin to resolve, early mobilization and physical therapy are instituted. Physical therapy is important to reeducate and strengthen the muscles around the ankle so that recurrent sprains do not occur. Severe sprains of the ankle are also treated with non-surgical management; however, the period of immobilization and the period before the symptoms resolve will be longer.

No matter what type of sprain occurs it is important to have adequate physical therapy to restrengthen and reeducate the ankle muscles so that return to full function can be assured.

FRACTURES

Ankle fractures are one of the most common fractures seen in the orthopaedic practice. Symptoms of an ankle fracture include, gross deformity, instability, localized bone tenderness, swelling, and an inability to bear weight. Patients with these symptoms after an injury should have x-rays of their ankle performed to rule out a fracture. Most ankle fractures involve a bone that is called the lateral malleolus. The lateral malleolus is that bone on the outside of your ankle. Isolated fractures of this bone usually do not require surgery and can be adequately treated in a cast. Fractures involving lateral malleolus and the medial malleolus (the bone on the inside of the ankle) are unstable and usually require a surgical treatment to insure a good functional result. These fractures are usually fixed with a combination of a plate and multiple screws.

ARTHRITIS

Arthritis of the foot and ankle are usually the result of a traumatic injury such as a fracture or chronic instability from recurrent ankle sprains. Symptoms of ankle arthritis include pain and swelling and decrease of range of motion.

The primary treatment for ankle arthritis is non-surgical. It includes non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, bracing, and physical therapy. Surgical options for the failure of non-surgical treatment include arthroscopy at which time the joint can be debrided and fusion of select joints.

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