Dislocations, Ankle

Ankle dislocations happen when force applied to the joint causes a dislocation of joint surfaces. This stable joint requires a large amount of force to become dislocated. Often it is seen along with a break in the bone (*fracture*).

The ankle joint is designed for a balance of stability and flexibility. During normal walking, the ankle joint bears 3-5 times the body weight. This factor increases during running and jumping activities. As weight is applied on heel strike, the fibula descends to increase stability of the ankle joint.

FACTS ABOUT ANKLE DISLOCATIONS

- Associated fractures are common.
- Injury to ligaments (*ligamentous injury*) varies according to the type of dislocation.
- Injury to nerves and vessels is the main concern with any dislocation. Vessel damage may result in bone death of the *talus* if not promptly reduced. The *talus* is the top bone of the foot. Skin over the dislocated area may be damaged.
- Dislocations of the ankle are seen more frequently in young males than in any other group. This may be related to their increased risk overall for injury.
- Postmenopausal women are at higher risk for associated fractures. Increased fracture risk probably is related to weakening of the bones (*osteoporosis*) in this age group.
- Children and adolescents have the most ankle dislocations.
- Surgery and admission to a hospital is usually required for care.
- If an orthopedic surgeon is not present at the hospital, the joint may have to be splinted. This would happen after the bones are put back into their proper position (*reduction*). Then the patient would be transferred to a center where proper care could be obtained.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is usually easily made with routine x-rays and examination.

There are a number of problems (*complications*) with having an ankle dislocation. The ankle often does not return to normal function. Some of these complications are:

- The fracture does not heal properly (*nonunion* or *malunion*).
- There is a *fusion* (coming together of parts) of the ankle bones (*synostosis*).
- There may be cord like structure (*tendon*) injury.
- Injury to the cartilage may occur. This can lead to later developing arthritis and loss of joint function.
- Joint stiffness and decreased range of motion.
- Injury to an artery may cause damage due to loss of blood supply.
- A rare swelling of compartments in the foot which may damage blood supply (*compartment syndrome*).

Your surgeon will help you with decisions about treatment.

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