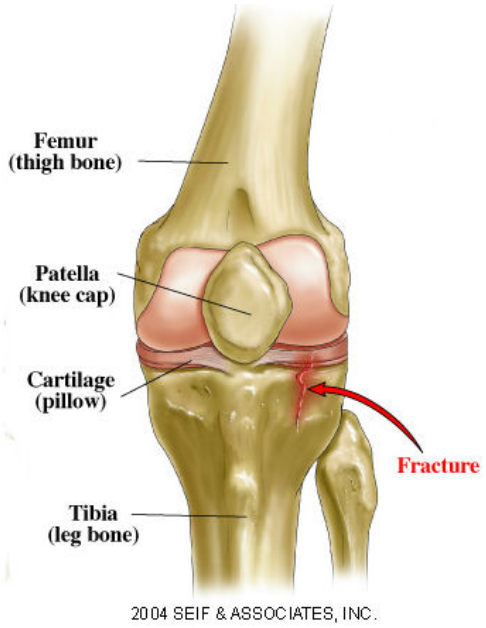
Knee Fracture, Adult

A knee fracture is a break in any of the bones of the lower part of the thigh bone, the upper part of the bones of the lower leg, or of the kneecap. When the bones no longer meet the way they are supposed to it is called a dislocation. Sometimes there can be a dislocation along with fractures.



SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may include pain, swelling, inability to bend the knee, deformity of the knee, and inability to walk.

DIAGNOSIS

This problem is usually diagnosed with x-rays. Special studies are sometimes done if a fracture is suspected but cannot be seen on ordinary x-rays. If vessels around the knee are injured, special tests may be done to see what the damage is.

TREATMENT

- The leg is usually splinted for the first couple of days to allow for swelling. After the swelling is down a cast is put on. Sometimes a cast is put on right away with the sides of the cast cut to allow the knee to swell. If the bones are in place, this may be all that is needed.
- If the bones are out of place, medications for pain are given to allow them to be put back in place. If they are seriously out of place, surgery may be needed to hold the pieces or breaks in place using wires, pins, screws or metal plates.
- Generally most fractures will heal in four to six weeks.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Use your crutches as directed.
- To lessen the swelling, keep the injured leg elevated while sitting or lying down.
- Apply ice to the injury for 15 to 20 minutes, four times per day while awake for 2 days. Put the ice in a plastic bag and place a thin towel between the bag of ice and your cast.
- If you have a plaster or fiberglass cast:
  - Do not try to scratch the skin under the cast using sharp or pointed objects.
  - Check the skin around the cast every day. You may put lotion on any red or sore areas.
  - Keep your cast dry and clean.
- If you have a plaster splint:
  - Wear the splint as directed.
  - You may loosen the elastic around the splint if your toes become numb, tingle, or turn cold or blue.
- Do not put pressure on any part of your cast or splint; it may break. Rest your cast only on a pillow the first 24 hours until it is fully hardened.
- Your cast or splint can be protected during bathing with a plastic bag. Do not lower the cast or splint into water.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- See your caregiver soon if your cast gets damaged or breaks.
- It is very important to keep all follow up appointments. Not following up as directed may result in a worsening of your condition or a failure of the fracture to heal properly.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have continued severe pain.
- You have more swelling than you did before the cast was put on.
- The area below the fracture becomes painful.
- Your skin or toenails below the injury turn blue or gray, or feel cold or numb.
- There is drainage coming from under the cast.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop (drugs used in treatment may produce side effects).

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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