

Toe and Forefoot Fractures

Nearly one-quarter of all the bones in the human body are located in the feet, which help provide you with movement and support. Broken bones in the forefoot or one of the toes can be quite painful, but rarely, is it disabling. Most of the time, the injuries will actually heal without having to worry about any operative treatment. As there are so many bones in the foot, it is relatively easy for the rest of the foot to compensate.

Following a fracture however, you will likely need crutches to help you walk. Within 4-6 weeks you will feel like you can start to weight bear on the foot again and you may go to one crutch, or no crutches. Specialized boots can also be worn to protect the foot but aid walking.

If you suspect fracture to the foot, consult a doctor or go to hospital. The medical team will do a physical examination and decide if you need an X-ray.

Toe and Forefoot Fractures Anatomy

The toes and the forefoot are composed of several bones. All of the four smaller toes begins with a metatarsal bone in the forefoot. As you move down the foot from the metatarsal, there are three smaller bones (phalanges). First, is the proximal phalanx. The middle phalanx comes next. Last is the distal phalanx.

The bones of the toes connect to form the toe joints. The MTP joint is the first one connecting the foot and the toe together. The MTP joints form the ball of the foot. The second joint is the PIP joint, while the last one of the DIP joint. All of the joints are surrounded by a capsule that is composed of ligaments holding the bones together. Two tendons run down the base of each toe, which allows you to curl your toes. A tendon running along the top of the toe helps to raise it.

One of the more commonly fractured toes is the 5th toe, known as a 5th metatarsal fracture. That can be from tripped, or falling over, or rolling the ankle awkwardly. You will feel pain on weight bearing around the outside edge of your foot. Fractures to the foot also commonly occur from dropping a heavy weight on the foot.

How to Treat Toe and Forefoot Fractures:

1. Ice

Apply ice to the affected area for 5-10 minutes at a time three to five times per day to help reduce swelling and pain. Make sure to wrap the ice in a thin towel to prevent any ice burn from occurring on the skin.

2. Rest

Rest is the main form of treatment for fractures in the foot. Refrain from any activities that might have triggered the injury in the first place, or those that cause pain in the site of the fracture, for at least three to four weeks. Choose a different activity that isn't going to cause you as much pain. Slowly return to activities.

3. Immobilization

The bone ends where the fracture occurred have to be realigned and kept immobilized to allow healing to occur. If the toe is broken, it might be buddy taped to a surrounding toe with a gauze pad in the middle to help absorb moisture. Replace the tape and gauze as needed. If swelling increases or the toes are numb, you will want to replace or remove the tape.

Tips:

- Avoid increasing your training regimen quickly, such as walking or running for an extended distance or time period.
- Make sure to wear the right type of shoes when heading out to exercise.
- Use the proper training techniques to prevent injuries from occurring in the foot.
- Ballet dancers are prone to injuring the foot from taking a misstep or falling from a pointe position.
- If needed, wear a supportive shoe to keep the foot protected in the healing process.