The Problem Ankle

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

As most patients know ankle injuries are very common. They range from simple strains to very complicated, challenging fractures.

Sprains
There are very few people who have not sprained their ankle at one time or another. Ankle sprains are classified into different grades and even the more severe ones are primarily treated conservatively i.e. they do not require surgery. I can’t say never, but it is rare.

Fractures
The most common ankle fracture occurs to the outer or lateral bone of the ankle called the fibula. I don’t want to confuse you with all the different patterns. These fractures are mostly aligned well enough that they can be treated in a cast or a walking brace. When I see them most of my patients are relieved to hear this!

Why Do Some Require Surgery?
At the ankle there are 3 bones. The large bone of the lower leg is the tibia. The smaller bone is the fibula. These 2 bones join at the ankle and sit on top of the ankle bone called the talus. The ankle joint is very flexible and mostly moves forward and backwards, but also twists too. Since you have to walk on this for the rest of your life it is important that the ankle heal in as near normal position as possible.

Orthopaedic Surgeons are usually the best physicians to make that determination of whether the fracture needs surgery or can be treated by casting or bracing.

Surgery: What Kind?
The most typical ankle fracture that I see which requires surgery is an ankle fractured on both the inner side and the outer or lateral side. A metal screw is inserted in the tibia and a plate and screws fix the lateral bone. These injuries in most cases are the result of a slip and fall.

For a small group of unlucky patients the injury results from an auto accident or a fall from a height. These injuries can result in very complicated fracture patterns that require a trauma Orthopaedic Surgeon who has special advanced training in fractures.

These Orthopaedic associates are a valuable resource to me and I know when to ask for their help.

Ankles Are Not Forgiving
By not forgiving I am referring to the fact that if there is any abnormality that exists in how the ankle is working you know it with every step. That is why it is so important to try to make the joint as close to normal as possible.

Of course there are innumerable other things that can go wrong with the ankle besides tissue injuries and fractures.

• Primarily arthritis (osteoarthritis) is the non trauma condition that affects the ankle and could result in surgery. The ankle just seems to wear out, which maybe from a genetic cause.
• Inflammatory joint conditions could cause the ankle to wear out and lose its natural cushion. Pain, swelling and stiffness are the result. Rheumatoid arthritis is an example.
Arthritis from previous trauma (post traumatic arthritis) is an important cause of ankle arthritis.

If surgery is needed the ankle might require ankle fusion or total joint replacement. Next week I hope you will return to learn about those two procedures in some detail.

*My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.*

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You will be amazed at all the helpful information it contains.

All of the information pertains to everything I treat in the office and hospital.

Be well.

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