

Ankle Fractures

Ankle fractures have obviously occurred for all times. Traditionally, treatment involved re-aligning the fracture, and then applying a plaster cast. Six weeks usually is enough. This works reasonable well most of the time, and success could reasonably be predicted if there was no pain, and a new x-ray at twelve days shows good alignment. Generally, stiffness had resolved by three months, and full function returned.

Some groups have bad outcomes. People with osteoporosis often have the fracture collapse. This can cause chronic pain, fractures around the joint can lead to post-traumatic osteoarthritis. Not moving your ankle in plaster is prone to causing blood clots, which can be dangerous.



Figure 1. The fracture or break is most obvious by comparing this to figure 2. The right hand side of this image shows the fibula, which is bent, and the left side where the bone fragment has been pulled off. Usually, there is soft tissue interposed, and it will not heal. This position is not acceptable, and cannot be fully corrected with plaster alone.



Figure 2. Fracture internally fixed with plate on fibula and screw to inner aspect.

Internal fixation of the ankle usually achieves perfect position of the fracture, with a much better chance of normal function in the long term. Once the wounds have healed, we often use a “VACOCast”, and allow you to put weight through the ankle. It typically takes a further 2 weeks to be able to walk without crutches. Some people might be advised to remain on crutches, or a frame, until six weeks.

The VACOCast can be removed at night-time, to do physiotherapy, and do exercises on your ankle. Once the wound has healed, it is advantageous to get the ankle joint moving. Early movement prevents stiffness of the joint, and an improved function at six weeks.

The traditional solution of not walking on the leg for six weeks in plaster typically saw the patients reasonably incapacitated for up to three months. We find most of our patients are good eight weeks from injury, and had a much easier recover.



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