



HOW TO IDENTIFY A BROKEN ANKLE

IS MY ANKLE BROKEN?

More than 1 million people visit emergency rooms each year with ankle injuries. But how do you know if your ankle is **broken** (fractured) or just **sprained**? Common folklore says that if you can move it, it isn't broken, but that is not always the case. A broken ankle can be a combination of injuries to your bones and ligaments (the connectors between bones).

Ankle anatomy

The ankle joint as we commonly refer to it is actually two joints. The true ankle joint (tibiotalar) is responsible for the up-down motion of our ankle, while the subtalar joint (talar calcaneal) is responsible for side-to-side motion.

The ankle (tibiotalar) joint is made up of three bones:

- the shin bone (tibia)
- the other bone of the lower leg (fibula)
- the ankle bone (talus)



The leg bones form a scooped pocket around the top of the ankle bone.

Right below the ankle joint is the subtalar joint, where the ankle bone connects to the heel bone (calcaneus). Three sets of ligaments connect the bones and provide stability to both joints.

The knobby bumps you can feel on either side of your ankle are the very ends of the lower leg bones. The bump on the outside of the ankle (lateral malleolus) is part of the fibula; the smaller bump on the inside of the ankle (medial malleolus) is part of the shin bone

Fracture or sprain?

Any one of the three bones that make up the ankle joint can break as the result of a fall, a car accident, or some other trauma to the ankle. A broken ankle may also involve damage to the ligaments.

Since a severe sprain can often mask the symptoms of a broken ankle, every injury to the ankle should be examined by a physician. Symptoms of a broken ankle include:

- Immediate and severe pain
- Swelling
- Bruising
- Tenderness when touched
- Inability to put any weight on the injured foot (or pain when you put weight on your foot)
- Deformity, particularly if there is a dislocation as well as a fracture

If you have an ankle injury with swelling, pain when putting weight on it, or deformity, you should see your primary care physician or **foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeon** for further evaluation.

In the evaluation, your doctor will take a thorough history of your injury, any prior ankle injuries, your current symptoms (complaints), and any treatment you have had. Your doctor will likely order radiographs (X-rays) to find the location of the break. Occasionally, advanced imaging such as MRI, **CT scan**, or bone scan will be necessary.

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