

## Education

### Broken Toe

What is a broken toe?

A broken toe is a break in a toe bone. A broken bone is also called a fracture. The break can occur in any of the toe bones. You may have a break in several places or the break may be in the joint between toe bones.

How does it occur?

A broken toe can occur several ways. Broken toes are commonly caused by a direct hit (such as kicking a hard object or something landing on the toe). A toe can also break from a twisting type injury.

If you play a sport where you don't wear shoes (such as martial arts, ballet, gymnastics) you are at an increased risk for a toe injury.

What are the symptoms?

You will have pain, swelling, and tenderness in the toe. It will be difficult to walk or run.

Your toe may turn black and blue. You may get bleeding or discoloration underneath your toenail. Your toenail may eventually come off.

How is it diagnosed?

Your provider will review your symptoms, ask about how the injury occurred, and examine you. A toe fracture is diagnosed by an x-ray showing a break in the bone.

How is it treated?

The treatment depends on the type of fracture you have. Usually the broken toe is taped to the toe directly next to it. In rare cases surgery must be done to fix the broken bone.

Treatment will also include:

- Putting ice packs on your toe for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for the first 2 to 3 days or until the pain goes away. Thereafter ice your toe at least once a day until the other symptoms are gone.
- Elevating your foot by placing a pillow underneath it to keep the swelling down. Try to keep your foot above the level of your heart.
- Taking an anti-inflammatory or pain medicine as prescribed by your provider.

Your provider may advise you to wear stiff-soled shoes. You may also be given crutches until you can walk without pain.

If your toenail is loose and has not yet fallen off keep a Band-Aid around it.

How long do the effects last?

It usually takes 4 to 6 weeks for a broken toe to heal. If the fracture goes into a joint your toe may continue to feel stiff and can lose some range of motion. You may develop arthritis over time. Sometimes a toe may become shorter after a fracture.

When can I return to my normal activities?

Everyone recovers from an injury at a different rate. Return to your activities will be determined by how soon your toe recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury has occurred. The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your normal activities as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury.

You may safely return to your normal activity when you can walk straight ahead without pain or limping.

How can I prevent a toe fracture?

Most toe fractures are caused by accidents that cannot be prevented. However it is important to wear proper fitting footwear and avoid playing or running on surfaces that are uneven.

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