

Distal Femoral Fractures

What are distal femoral fractures?

A distal femoral fracture is a break in the thighbone (femur) just above the knee. Distal femoral fractures occur due to:

- weak bones (in older people)
- a fall from a height
- car/motor bike accidents

What are the symptoms of a distal femoral fracture?

- Symptoms of a distal femoral fracture include:
- pain, especially when trying to bear weight on the leg
- swelling and bruising
- deformity (e.g. the leg may be at an odd angle or appear shorter than the other)
- inability to bear weight
- inability to move your lower limb
- numbness or tingling in your shin, ankle, foot or toes

What does your doctor look for?

Your doctor will ask about you about how the injury happened, about your symptoms and take a general medical history (e.g. pre-existing conditions such as osteoporosis, and previous injuries). Your doctor will examine your leg looking for tenderness, swelling, deformity, movement and for signs of blood vessel or nerve damage.

How are distal femoral fractures treated?

Treatment depends on the severity of the fracture and on your general health and age, which affect your healing ability.

Some fractures will heal with conservative therapy. This typically involves stabilising the placing the leg in a cast or brace and taking pain medications. The cast or splint will usually be worn for 4–6 weeks.

Surgery is usually needed if the bones are displaced. During surgery, the bones are realigned and held together. The bones may be held together with internal pins or nails or screws and plates.

Rehabilitation

Once you're allowed to bear weight on your leg, it's quite common to experience weakness, instability, and stiffness. Although this is to be expected, it's important to discuss them with your doctor and physiotherapist. They will tailor a rehabilitation program aimed at restoring muscle strength, improving joint mobility, and enhancing flexibility. It can take many months of rehabilitation to return to normal activities after a distal femoral fracture.