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Hip Fracture

What is a hip fracture?

If you have fractured your hip, you have broken the top of your thigh bone, most likely between the main part of the bone and the ball part of the hip socket joint. Sometimes the bones don't separate after breaking, which makes the fracture hard to diagnose.

A hip fracture is a very serious condition. It can cause you to be immobile for a long period of time, leading to complications such as blood clots, pneumonia, urinary tract infections, bed sore and loss of muscles. Around half of the people who have a hip fracture can't return to independent living afterwards.

Hip fractures are more common in older people, particularly those with osteoporosis. Some medications, balance problems and poor vision (leading to trips and falls) increase the risk of hip fractures.

What causes a hip fracture?

A fall is the most common reason for a hip fracture among the elderly. If you are younger, a hip fracture is generally the result of a car accident, a fall from a great height, or severe trauma.

A hip fracture is more common in older people. This is generally due to osteoporosis. Bones affected by osteoporosis are more likely to break if you fall. Most hip fractures that older people get happen as a result of falling while walking on a level surface, often at home.

What are the symptoms of hip fracture?

The symptoms of hip fracture are:

- severe pain in your groin or front of your hip
- being unable to bear weight on the affected leg
- swelling, stiffness and bruising of your hip
- the foot of the affected leg is turned out at an odd angle, making the leg appear shorter
- being unable to get up after falling

What investigations are needed?

In addition to a physical examination and medical history. Imaging studies will help confirm the diagnosis and provide more information about the fracture.

X-rays- provide images of dense structures, such as bone. Most hip fractures can be diagnosed with an X-ray.

CT scan- will provide a detailed cross-sectional image of your hip. Your doctor may order a CT scan to learn more about your fracture.

MRI Scan- An MRI scan provides fine images of both soft tissue structures and bone. Because it is very sensitive, it can sometimes detect a small or incomplete fracture that cannot be seen on an X-ray.

How is a hip fracture treated?

Hip fractures are generally treated with surgery, in combination with medication and rehabilitation.

Hip fracture surgery

A hip fracture can be repaired with the help of metal screws, plates and rods. In some cases, artificial replacements (prostheses) of parts of the hip joint may be necessary. The type of surgery needed depends on the location and severity of the fracture, and on your general health and age. Options include:

- Repairing the fracture with metal screws to hold the broken parts together
- Partial hip replacement, where your surgeon removes the top of the thigh bone including the ball part of the hip socket joint and replaces this with a metal implant (prosthesis)
- Total hip replacement, where both the ball and the socket part of the hip joint are removed and replaced with prostheses

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation starts soon after surgery (usually the next day) to help get you moving and shorten the length of time you are immobile.

Many patients go home after hip fracture surgery, but some will need short-term care in a rehabilitation facility. Usually, these patients are elderly or have no-one to help them at home. If you go to a rehabilitation facility, you will need to stay there until you can walk independently and manage your daily activities.

Hip Fracture Prevention

- Consuming enough vitamin D and calcium
- Talk to you GP about getting a bone density test
- Stop smoking and avoid excessive alcohol consumption
- Engaging in exercise to improve balance, coordination and maintain muscle strength
- Remove trip hazards
- Install grab bars in the bathroom
- Use rug pads or non-slip backing to keep rugs in place
- Regular visits to the ophthalmologist to have vision checked