

What is the best way to treat an ankle fracture?

Clinical Question What are the most effective rehabilitation interventions for the management of ankle fractures in adults?

Bottom Line In comparing early versus delayed weight-bearing after surgical fracture management, early weight-bearing (3 weeks after fracture or surgery) likely results in a small improvement in activity limitation. There was no or very little impact on quality of life, participant satisfaction, pain, and adverse events.

For removable versus non-removable ankle support, removable support after surgery may improve ankle function and health-related quality of life, though these differences were again small. For non-surgical fracture management, there is little difference between support types.

Lastly, the effectiveness of physical therapy interventions compared to usual care is uncertain due to very low-certainty evidence and variability across studies.

Caveat The majority of participants were adults under 65 years of age, with no studies specifically targeting interventions for older adults over 65, who are a key demographic for ankle fractures. Additionally, most participants underwent surgical management, with only a few studies including those who received non-surgical treatment, limiting the generalizability of the findings to non-surgical cases.

Context An ankle fracture is a common lower limb injury often caused by twisting, falls, or sports activities. Incidence rates vary but are increasing, particularly among the elderly. Although immobilising the ankle supports and protects the fracture site during the early stages of healing, it also raises the risk of weakness, stiffness, and lingering pain. Rehabilitation from these injuries focuses on restoring mobility and strength, beginning during or after initial treatment, with protocols sometimes recommending early weight-bearing and exercise.

Cochrane Systematic Review Lewis SR, Pritchard MW, Parker R, Searle HKC, Beckenkamp PR, Keene DJ, Bretherton C, Lin C-WC. Rehabilitation for ankle fractures in adults. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2024, Issue 9. Art. No.: CD005595. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD005595.pub4. This review contains 53 trials which included 4489 people.

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Systematic review link:

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD005595.pub4/full>