

Paul D Maitino DO FAOAO Hip Knee Shoulder & sports medicine Oklahoma City OK

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Malunions and Nonunions

A fracture is a break in the bone. Bones tend to break when a heavy force is applied on it. The severity of a fracture will depend on the amount of force applied on the bone. They can occur from a traumatic fall, sport, vehicle accidents or any kind of physical injury. Weak bones, due to conditions such as osteoporosis and cancer, can greatly increase the risk of fractures.

Fractures are fairly common, and most of them heal easily, requiring anywhere between a few weeks to a couple of months depending on the extent of the injury, age and physical condition of the injured. However, when complications occur, they can be life-threatening. Listed below are some of the complications that could result from fractures.

Nonunion

Nonunion is the condition where your broken bones fail to heal in a stipulated amount of time. Normally, new bone tissue forms around the fracture. Any block in the blood supply or lack of stability of your bone can interfere with this healing process. Nonunion is characterized by pain lasting many months or years, and may be constant or occur only when the injured part is used.

Treatment may include use of a bone stimulator (a small device that creates ultrasonic or electromagnetic waves) placed on the skin, over the nonunion to stimulate bone repair. When conservative measures fail, you may be recommended surgical repair, which may include bone grafts (bone cells transplanted from another part of the body), internal fixation (metal screws and plates placed on the bone to hold it in place), or external fixation (rigid frame fixed from the outside to hold the bones together).

Malunion

Malunion is a condition where your fracture heals but not in the right position. This can cause your bone to be shorter, bent, or twisted, and can occur at joints where your fracture has displaced the bone, resulting in rough cartilage (cushioning tissue between bones). When these bones rub against each other, you may experience pain, swelling, deformity, and weight bearing difficulties.

You may be recommended to undergo a surgical treatment, where your bone will be cut to correct the misalignment, and secured in position using pins, plates, or rods.