



Weekend Doctor

By DR. THOMAS F. VAIL

Falls on icy surfaces are a major cause of ankle sprains and fractures. It's critical to seek prompt treatment to prevent further damage that can prolong recovery.

For women, this winter's fashionable high-heeled boots put them at higher risk for slips, falls and injuries on ice and snow. These popular boots typically feature tall, spiked heels and narrow, pointed toes.

Wearing high heels makes you more unstable when walking or standing on dry surfaces, let alone slippery ones like ice or snow.

Falls from high-heeled winter boots can lead to a number of injuries, depending on how a woman loses her balance.

In any event, a stylish, low-heeled winter boot is a lot more fashionable than a cast and crutches.

I recommend scuffing-up the soles of new boots or purchasing adhesive rubber soles to provide greater traction.

The ankle joint is vulnerable to serious injury from hard falls on ice.

Ice accelerates the fall and often causes more severe trauma because the foot can go in any direction after slipping.

In cases of less-severe fractures and sprains, it is possible to walk and mistakenly believe the injury doesn't require medical treatment.

Never assume the ability to walk means your ankle is not broken or badly sprained.

Putting weight on an injured joint can worsen the problem and lead to chronic instability, joint pain and arthritis later in life.

Some people may even fracture and sprain an ankle at the same time. Believe it or not, a bad sprain can mask a fracture.

It is best to have an injured ankle evaluated as soon as possible for proper diagnosis and treatment.

If you can't get to a foot and ankle surgeon or the emergency room right away, follow the RICE technique – Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation – until medical care is available.

Even though the symptoms of ankle sprains and fractures are similar, fractures are associated with:

- Pain at the site of the fracture that can extend from the foot to the knee.
- Significant swelling.
- Blisters over the fracture site.
- Bruising soon after the injury.
- Bone protruding through the skin, also known as a compound fracture, which requires immediate attention.

Most ankle fractures and some sprains are treated by immobilizing the joint in a cast or splint to promote union and healing.

However, surgery may be needed to repair fractures with significant mal-alignment to unite bone fragments and realign them properly.

Newly designed surgical plates and screws allow repair of these injuries with less surgical trauma.

With newer bone-fixation methods, smaller incisions minimize tissue damage and bleeding and accelerate the healing process.

If you injure your ankle in any way, schedule an appointment with your podiatrist.

If you fall on an icy spot and hurt your ankle, seek medical attention immediately.

This aids in early diagnosis and proper treatment of the ankle injury and reduces the risk of further damage to your foot or ankle.



Vail