

Distal Femur Fractures - Diagnosis and Treatment



Distal femur fractures are those that extend to the femoral condyles from the distal metaphyseal-diaphyseal junction of the femur. These fractures often occur because of high-energy trauma that includes motor vehicle accidents and falling from height.

Distal femur fractures are severe and often require surgery for treatment. Orthopedic nails and other implants are required to fix these fractures and ensure proper healing.

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In this post, we will be discussing distal femur fractures in detail along with their causes, diagnosis, and treatment.

What Causes Distal Femur Fractures?

Traumatic injuries, especially high-energy events often cause fractures in the distal femur in young adults aged around 30 years. Falling from a height and a direct blow to the femur are also the causes of fractures in the distal femur in adults. Fractures occurring because of high-energy events are intra-articular fractures.

In the elderly, low-energy events like twisting or falling at home cause fractures in the distal femur. This is because the bones in the elderly are weaker when compared to adults and hence, a slight fall can cause a fracture. A similar is the case in people with osteoporosis.

What Are the Symptoms of Distal Femur Fractures?

Fractures are always painful and the intensity of the impact and its cause decides how severe the pain will be. Besides pain, other signs & symptoms associated with the fractures include:

Deformity in the leg

Pain with weight-bearing

Swelling and bruising at the fracture site

Tenderness to touch

How Distal Femur Fractures Are Classified?

Based on the AO classification, distal femur fractures are classified into three types:

Type A – Extra-articular fractures

Type B – Partial articular fractures; are when a part of the articular surface is attached to the metaphysis and diaphysis.

Type C – Complete articular fractures; are when the fracture crosses the joint surface and gets separated from the diaphysis.

How Distal Femur Fractures Are Diagnosed?

The diagnosis of the condition is done with a physical examination followed by imaging tests. During the physical examination, the orthopedic specialist will look for the deformity in the leg along with swelling and bruising. After this, the healthcare service provider suggests imaging tests to identify the severity of the fracture along with its type. The imaging tests that will be ordered include:

X-ray, especially the lateral and AP view

CT scan to identify intra-articular fracture

What is the Treatment for Distal Femur Fractures?

Surgery is preferred for the treatment of most distal femur fractures. Non-surgical treatment is preferred in the case of stable non-displaced fractures.

Intramedullary nailing and screw fixation are best to treat extra-articular or simple intra-articular fractures. If the fracture type is simple unicondylar or epicondyle, simple screw fixation can manage the condition. Besides all this, arthroplasty is required for extremely comminuted and non-reconstructable fractures. The same is the treatment for patients with pre-existing arthroplasty.

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