

Tibia & Pilon Fracture Fixation — Pre-Operative Patient Guide

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Distal Tibia and Pilon Fractures (Shin Bone Fracture at the Ankle) — Open Reduction and Internal Fixation (ORIF)

Your Condition & Procedure

The condition

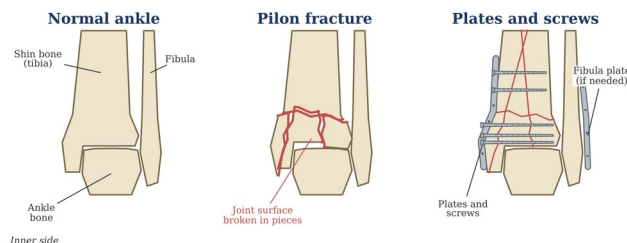
The lower end of the **tibia** (shin bone) forms the roof of the ankle joint. A **distal tibia fracture** breaks the bone just above the ankle; a **pilon fracture** also breaks into the joint surface, often from a fall from height or a car crash. These injuries cause major swelling and pain, and the skin is fragile.

The surgery

Because swelling can be severe, surgery is often staged: a temporary external frame first, then final fixation once the skin is ready (often 1–3 weeks later). Through one or more incisions, the joint surface and bone are lined up and held with plates and screws; the fibula may also be fixed. The final plan is determined during surgery.

Risks & benefits

Benefits: Restoring the joint surface and alignment gives the best chance of a stable ankle you can walk on. **Risks** are uncommon and include infection, blood clots, wound-healing problems (more common with this injury), the bone healing slowly or not at all, ankle stiffness, ankle arthritis over time (common after pilon fractures), injury to nearby structures (such as nerves, blood vessels, or cartilage), stiffness, persistent pain, and the need for further surgery. These will be reviewed with you in detail before surgery.



Pilon fracture and plate fixation (illustration)

Before Surgery

- **Medications:** We will tell you what to stop and when (e.g., blood thinners, anti-inflammatories, some supplements, weight-loss injections).
- **Fasting:** Follow the instructions from your surgery coordinator/facility. In general, you should have nothing to eat or drink starting at midnight the night before surgery.
- **Nicotine:** Stop all nicotine products—they slow healing.
- **Equipment:** Crutches or a knee scooter and a boot or splint are typically arranged. Practice with crutches or scooter.
- **Physical therapy:** Typically starts ~2 weeks after surgery, once the incision has healed.
- **Home:** Plan for a helper and remove trip hazards; a shower chair can help.
- **Medical history:** Let us know if you or anyone in your family has a history of blood clot disorders or a malignant hyperthermia reaction to anesthesia.
- **Health:** Call us if you develop a fever, illness, or skin problem near the ankle.

Day of Surgery

- If instructed, take blood pressure/heart medications with a small sip of water.
- Arrive at the time given by your surgery coordinator.
- Bring your medication list, insurance card, photo ID, and crutches/scooter if you have them.
- Wear loose clothing; leave jewelry and valuables at home.
- A responsible adult must drive you home. You may **not** drive yourself.

Immediately After Surgery

- You will recover in the recovery area; many patients stay in the hospital for one or more nights.
- Your surgeon will discuss the procedure with you and your support person.
- Your care team will review wound care, restrictions, medications, follow-up, and warning signs before discharge.

Milestone	What to Expect After Surgery (General Timeline)
Splint & boot	Splint and strict elevation for 2 weeks for swelling and wound healing, then a boot; ankle motion out of the boot begins then.
Weight-bearing	Touch-down weight (foot flat, ~20 lb) with crutches for 6 weeks—often 10–12 weeks for pilon fractures—then ~25% more each week after x-rays.
Daily life	Desk work often within 2–3 weeks if you can keep the leg elevated. No driving while taking narcotic pain medication.
Activity	Full release typically 4–6 months. Running between 4 and 6 months once healed; after pilon fractures, impact activities may stay limited.
► Please note: This is a general guide only. Detailed post-operative instructions will be provided on the day of surgery, and your restrictions and timeline may change based on the findings and procedures performed.	

Learn More

We **strongly recommend** reading these pages from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (OrthoInfo) before your surgery:

- **Your condition: Pilon Fractures of the Ankle** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/diseases--conditions/pilon-fractures-of-the-ankle/>
- **Your procedure: Internal Fixation for Fractures** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/treatment/internal-fixation-for-fractures/>

Video: You may find a video demonstrating an example (not the exact technique) of your surgery at

<https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/activity/2421769-pilon-fractures-of-the-ankle> (or browse <https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/catalog>).