

Treating Vertebral Compression Fractures

Compression fractures are a common, painful problem for children and adults who have OI. This occurs when an injury causes the spinal bone or vertebra to fracture and collapse (compress). This type of fracture can be painful when it happens, but can also cause ongoing back pain. The goal of treatment is to encourage healing, keep the spine stable, restore function and reduce or eliminate pain. It can take 3 months or more to fully heal. The basics about compression fractures are no different for people with OI than for the general population except that they happen more frequently when OI is involved.

Symptoms

- Sudden, severe back pain
- The pain gets worse when you stand up or walk, or bend over
- Chronic back pain that doesn't seem to get better
- Worsening of pre-existing spine curves
- Other signs can include hip pain, and breathing problems

Pain

- Spine fractures can be very painful
- Some people report a sudden sharp pain
- Some people only report a chronic backache
- Some people will continue to have pain even after the fracture has healed

Treatment

It can take two or three months for this type of fracture to heal. Doctors familiar with OI recommend starting with the standard treatment. Whether a surgical procedure is an appropriate treatment for those with slow healing compression fractures can only be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Standard Treatment

- Limited bed rest
- Pain medicines – often a combination of over the counter and prescription drugs
- Activity modifications: no lifting, bending, or twisting
- Gradual return to normal activities following guidance from your doctor

When healing is delayed or pain is difficult to manage a soft back support may be prescribed. These must be carefully fitted and monitored to avoid putting pressure on the ribs that can cause new fractures.

Surgical Procedures

- When there is severe incapacitating pain
- When healing is delayed or when bone fragments are present

Any procedure should be done by a doctor who not only is skilled in the procedure but also experienced caring for people with OI.

After Care:

Anyone who has had a compression fracture will always need to be careful to stand, lift and bend carefully. Activities that jolt the spine such as some amusement park rides; roads with lots of potholes; or jumping down from even a moderate height should be avoided. Steps to take after the fracture has healed include:

- Chair cushions to provide support to the lower spine
- Getting up out of a desk chair at least a few minutes every hour
- A gradual return to exercise such as walking and/or swimming

This fact sheet was reviewed in 2007 and 2016.