



TAYLOR TIDBITS

BONE & JOINT HEALTH AWARENESS

Since the football season is well underway, I thought we could discuss injuries to the joints. Fractures are common, and most people are familiar with the more common phrase broken bone. This type of injury is usually easy to diagnose with x-ray and treatment can be immobilization or surgery.

Also common, but much less understood are joint injuries. The most common would be an ankle sprain. All appear to be fractures initially, but, joint sprains are much harder to diagnose and rely on the skill and experience of the examiner. Any joint that moves can be injured by a sprain. This occurs when a ligament is stretched or torn.

Joints which move must have restraints to control motion. The most common type of joint restraint is a ligament. This tissue connects bone to bone. A very well-known ligament injury is the dreaded ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament) tear. This is a specific knee ligament injury which requires surgery in young, active patients.

Less commonly known joint restraint is the capsule. This is the lining of the joint, and in many cases, the ligaments are within the joint capsule. Whenever a joint is stretched, the joint capsule and ligament suffer a trauma with bleeding. This is the cause of swelling and bruising in traumatized joints.

Often, if an x-ray is negative, the injury is more severe than appreciated. Severely painful and swollen joints frequently need the same immobilization as a fracture but usually for a shorter duration. Bone is the only tissue that heals back to 100% strength. When joint stabilizing structures are torn, the joint is often left with some instability which may or may not be a long term problem.

In the future, when you have a joint injury and x-rays are negative, remember that these injuries frequently require treatment similar to a fracture.

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