Skull Fracture

A skull fracture is a fracture or break in the bone surrounding the brain (the skull). The skull has many bones that are joined together to protect the brain from injury. When the head is hit hard enough, the skull can break or fracture from the force of impact.

Signs of a Skull Fracture

With a skull fracture you may have these signs:

- Swelling and bruising at the site of injury
- Bleeding at the site of injury
- Headache or head pain

Some cases of skull fracture can be serious, causing the person to also have injury to the brain. Brain injury occurs when there is:

- Injury to the blood vessels, which then bleed into the spaces around the brain.
- Confusion, drowsiness or loss of consciousness
- Tearing of the layers of tissue that cover the brain called the meninges
- Damage to the brain from pieces of the fractured bone pressing inward
- Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leaking from the ears or nose – CSF is a clear fluid that surrounds the brain
Types of Skull Fractures

An x-ray or computerized tomography (CT) scan of the head may be done to find what type of fracture you have.

- A **linear skull fracture** is a break in the bone that looks like a thin line. This is the most common type of fracture and often heals without surgery.

- A **depressed skull fracture** occurs when the blow to the head causes pieces of broken bone to press into the brain. Injury to the brain and bleeding inside the brain are common. Surgery will be needed to repair the bones. Surgery may also be needed to treat bleeding inside the brain.

- A **basilar skull fracture** involves breaks in the bone at the base of the skull. It may not show up in x-rays. A doctor will diagnosis basilar skull fracture based upon his or her assessment of the injury. Signs include:
  - Drainage of clear fluid from the ears or nose due to a tear in the covering of the brain. This fluid is cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), a clear fluid that surrounds the brain.
  - Bruising under the eyes and behind the ears. Blood leaks from damaged blood vessels and collects under the eyes or behind the ears.

A CSF leak may heal on its own, or a drain to redirect the fluid, antibiotic medicine or surgery may be needed.
Recovery

Your doctor and health care team members will talk with you about your recovery. Your recovery will depend on the type of fracture you have and if you have other injuries.

- It takes about 6 to 8 weeks for broken bones to heal.
- Injuries to the brain from a skull fracture, however, have a longer recovery, and may require special support.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.