

Patient education: Hip fracture (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What is a hip fracture? — A "fracture" is another word for a broken bone. A hip fracture is when a person breaks the top of the thigh bone (femur) near the hip joint ([figure 1](#)).

There are different types of hip fractures. The type of hip fracture depends on which part of the thigh bone breaks and how it breaks.

Hip fractures are usually caused by falls. Hip fractures happen most often in older adults, especially those with a disease that makes the bones weak, called osteoporosis.

What are the symptoms of a hip fracture? — Symptoms of a hip fracture include:

- Pain in the hip or groin
- Being unable to walk
- Swelling
- Bruising

A hip fracture can also make the injured leg look like it's turned away from the body and shorter than the uninjured leg.

Is there a test for a hip fracture? — Yes. The doctor or nurse will ask about your injury and symptoms, do an exam, and order an X-ray.

Some people need an imaging test called an MRI scan. Imaging tests create pictures of the inside of the body.

How are hip fractures treated? — First, your doctor will treat your pain. Doctors can use different medicines to treat pain. The medicines can come as a shot, pill, or through a thin tube that goes into your vein, called an "IV."

Then most people with a hip fracture are treated with surgery. People usually have surgery within a few days of their injury. Doctors can use 2 main types of surgery to treat a hip fracture, depending on the type of fracture.

In one type of surgery, the doctor puts screws, pins, rods, or plates inside the body to fix the fracture.

The other type of surgery used to treat a hip fracture is a total or partial hip replacement. During this surgery, the doctor replaces either the whole hip joint or parts of it with man-made replacements ([figure 2](#)).

After surgery, you will work with a physical therapist (exercise expert). He or she will teach you exercises to make the muscles around your hip stronger. He or she will work with you on bending, walking, and climbing stairs so you can move normally.

In some cases, hip fractures are not treated with surgery. For instance, people who have a mild fracture and are still able to walk might not need surgery. Their fracture will heal on its own.

After your hip fracture, your doctor will probably test you for osteoporosis. This involves a special X-ray called a bone density test. Your doctor might also treat you for osteoporosis. Treatment for osteoporosis usually involves medicines called bisphosphonates.

How long do hip fractures take to heal? — Hip fractures take weeks to months to heal, depending on the type of fracture.

Healing time also depends on the person. Healthy children usually heal much more quickly than older adults or adults with other medical problems.

Can I do anything to improve the healing process? — Yes. It's important to follow all of your doctor's instructions while your hip fracture is healing. Plus, your doctor will probably recommend that you:

- Eat a healthy diet that includes getting enough calcium, vitamin D, and protein ([figure 3](#)).
- Stop smoking. A fracture can take longer to heal if you smoke.

When should I call my doctor or nurse? — After treatment, your doctor or nurse will tell you when to call him or her. In general, you should call him or her if:

- You get a fever.
- You have severe pain, or your pain or swelling gets worse.
- Your leg gets swollen or you see red streaks on your leg.
- You have chest pain, trouble breathing, or dizziness.
- Fluid or pus drains out of the cut from your surgery.
- You get an open sore on your skin.

More on this topic

[Patient education: Pelvic fracture \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Fractures \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Osteoporosis \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Hip replacement \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Bone density testing \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Calcium and vitamin D for bone health \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Preventing falls \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Quitting smoking \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Pressure sores \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Total hip replacement \(arthroplasty\) \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Quitting smoking \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Calcium and vitamin D for bone health \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Bone density testing \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Osteoporosis prevention and treatment \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

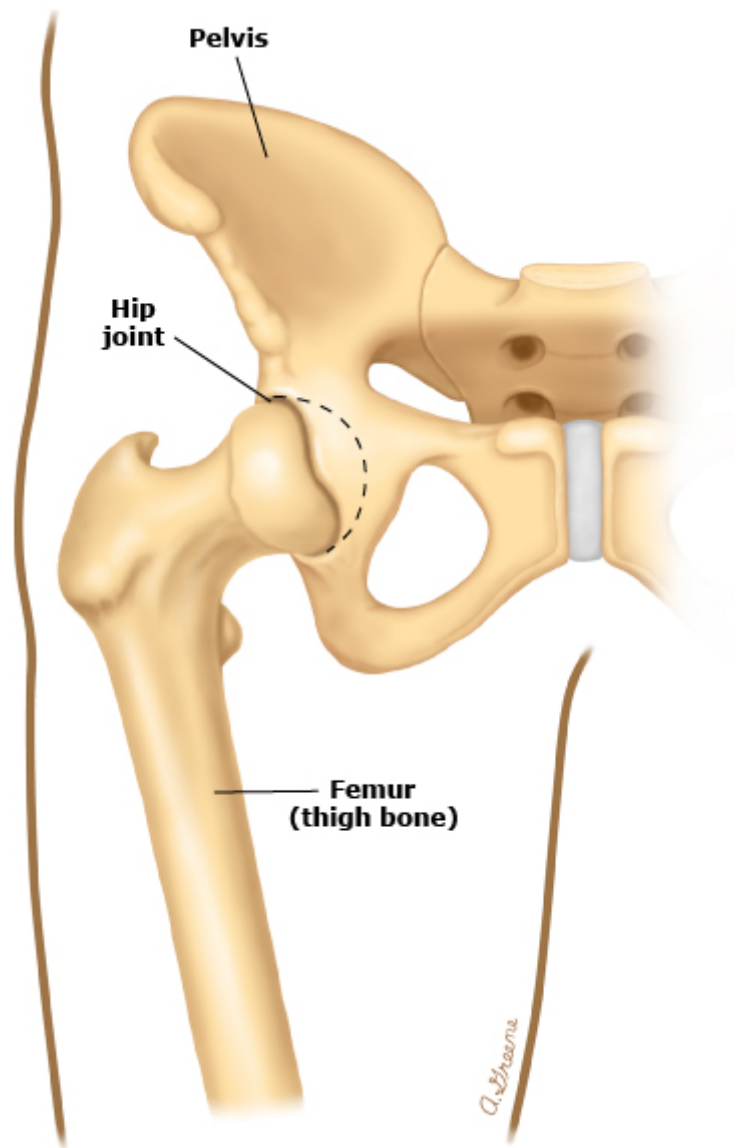
This topic retrieved from UpToDate on: Dec 29, 2017.

The content on the UpToDate website is not intended nor recommended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your own physician or other qualified health care professional regarding any medical questions or conditions. The use of UpToDate content is governed by the [UpToDate Terms of Use](#). ©2017 UpToDate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Topic 82818 Version 4.0

GRAPHICS

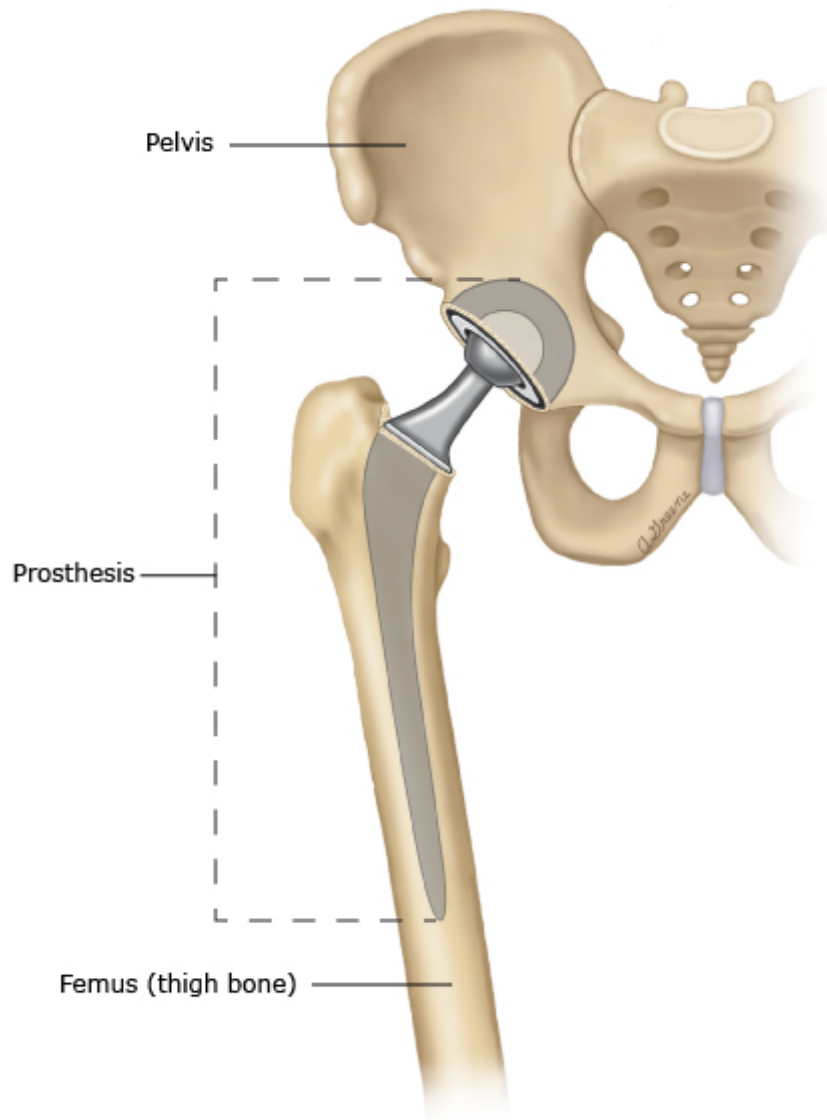
Hip



This drawing shows the location of the pelvis, hip joint, and femur (thigh bone).

Graphic 82793 Version 2.0

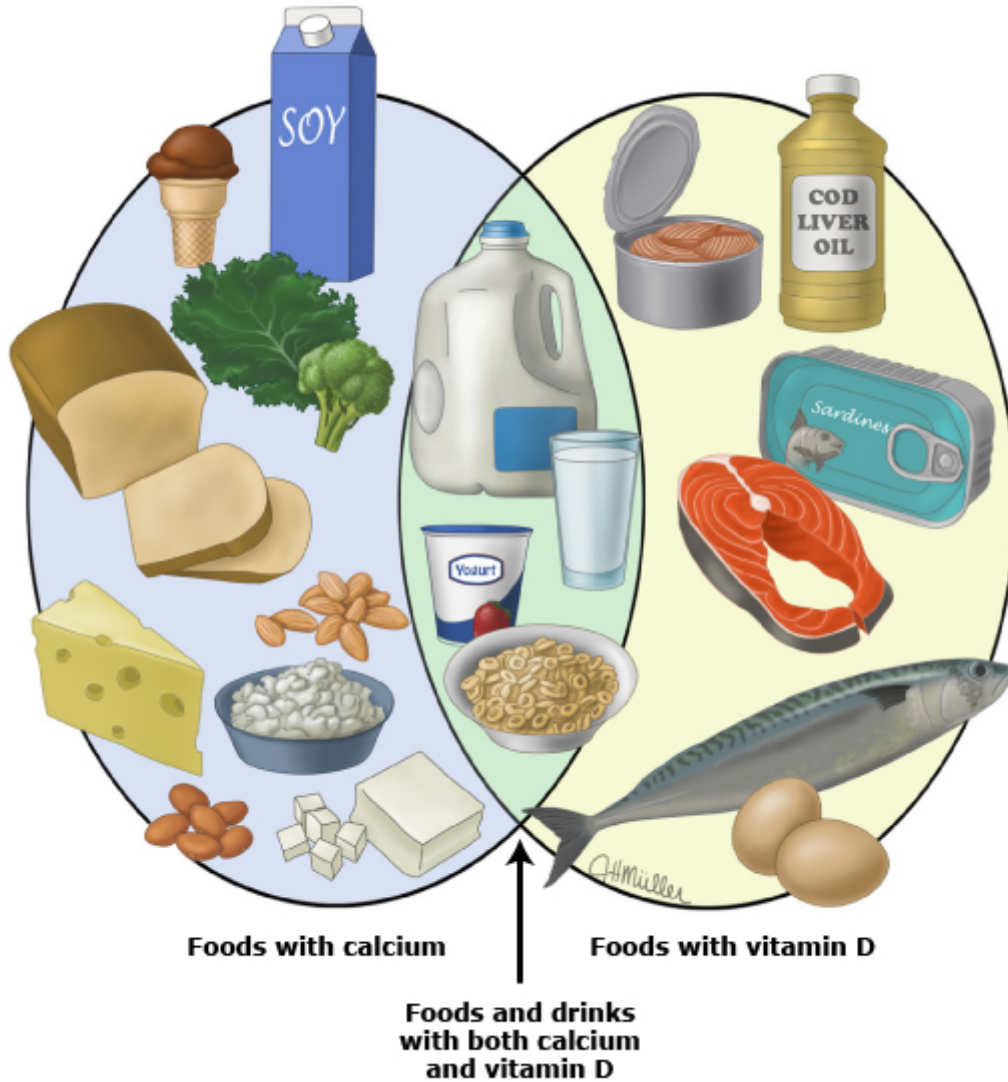
Hip replacement



For a hip replacement, your doctor will do surgery to replace your hip joint with a new joint called a "prosthesis." The prosthesis might be made out of plastic, metal, and/or ceramic.

Graphic 65030 Version 6.0

Foods and drinks with calcium and vitamin D



Foods rich in calcium include ice cream, soy milk, breads, kale, broccoli, milk, cheese, cottage cheese, almonds, yogurt, ready-to-eat cereals, beans, and tofu. Foods rich in vitamin D include milk, canned tuna fish, cod liver oil, yogurt, ready-to-eat-cereals, cooked salmon, canned sardines, mackerel, and eggs. Some of these foods are rich in both.