

When a Car Accident Leaves You Unable to Walk — Ankle and Foot Injuries in Texas Crashes

Why Orthopedic Injuries to the Lower Extremities Can Produce Long Recoveries in Personal Injury Cases

The first hours after a serious car accident are about triage. Emergency teams may be focused on possible head, chest, abdominal, or spinal injuries before a painful foot or ankle becomes the main concern. Swelling can also increase after the crash, and some ligament or joint injuries aren't obvious on an initial exam or non-weight-bearing X-ray.

That matters because severe ankle and foot injuries can affect far more than a person's ability to walk for a few weeks. Fractures, ligament disruptions, joint damage, and crush injuries may require immobilization, surgery, months of rehabilitation, and changes in the way a person works or moves. Prompt diagnosis is important, but the fracture pattern itself is created by the crash; delays are more likely to affect swelling, soft-tissue condition, stability, and treatment planning than to turn a simple fracture into a different fracture pattern.

At Smith & Hassler, our [Houston car accident attorneys](#) represent people who've sustained serious foot and ankle injuries in Texas crashes. We look at the injury from both directions: what the orthopedic record shows now and what the limitations, future treatment, and work consequences may look like months or years later.

What Makes Foot and Ankle Injuries Common in Car Crashes

The foot and ankle can be exposed to substantial force in a frontal or angular impact because of where they sit in the vehicle; often planted on the floor or brake pedal with the footwell around them. When crash intrusion reaches that area, force can be transmitted through the heel, ankle, midfoot, and lower leg.

Crash mechanics can produce different patterns. A side impact may drive the door or interior structure toward the lower leg. A driver bracing on the brake can place the ankle and foot under load as the vehicle is struck. High-energy frontal collisions can produce particularly severe [bone fractures](#), including open fractures and crush injuries that may need urgent orthopedic treatment.

The specific injuries that can occur include:

- [Calcaneus \(Heel Bone\) Fractures](#): The calcaneus forms the heel and helps carry body weight during standing and walking. In a motor-vehicle collision, a high-energy load can drive the heel against the floorboard and force the calcaneus against the talus. Severe fractures may involve multiple fragments and the subtalar joint. Treatment varies with

the fracture pattern, but displaced injuries may require surgery, and a severe injury can take a year or longer to reach its final level of recovery.

- **Lisfranc Injuries**: The Lisfranc joint complex connects the midfoot and forefoot. Injury can range from ligament damage to fracture-dislocation. Subtle Lisfranc injuries can be missed on non-weight-bearing X-rays, which is why weight-bearing imaging, CT, or MRI may be considered when the diagnosis remains in doubt. Even after treatment, some patients develop persistent pain or post-traumatic arthritis.
- **Malleolar Ankle Fractures**: The medial, lateral, and posterior malleoli form the bony structures around the ankle. Depending on which areas are fractured and whether the ankle is unstable or displaced, treatment may range from immobilization to surgical fixation with plates and screws.
- **Tibial Pilon Fractures**: A pilon fracture involves the weight-bearing surface at the bottom of the tibia. These injuries usually result from high-energy trauma and can damage both bone and surrounding soft tissue. Many require surgery, sometimes in stages, and post-traumatic arthritis is a significant long-term concern.
- **Soft Tissue and Tendon Injuries**: Achilles tendon injuries, peroneal tendon tears, plantar fascia injuries, and other soft-tissue damage can occur with or without a fracture. Some injuries can be treated without surgery, while others need operative repair. The long-term effect depends on the structure injured, the severity of the damage, and how well strength, stability, and range of motion return.

A Foot Injury Can Be Missed Even When the Initial X-Ray Isn't Dramatic

Not every serious foot injury announces itself with an obvious fracture on the first image. A Lisfranc injury is a good example. The alignment can appear normal on a non-weight-bearing film even when the supporting ligament complex is damaged. Persistent midfoot pain, swelling, bruising on the sole of the foot, or difficulty bearing weight can prompt additional orthopedic evaluation.

That distinction matters in a legal claim too. If the first emergency-room record says "no acute fracture" but later imaging shows a ligament disruption or unstable joint, an insurance company may try to characterize the injury as unrelated or delayed. The medical timeline has to show why the later diagnosis is consistent with the crash rather than simply treating the first X-ray as the last word.

The Medical Timeline Can Drive the Financial Impact

Consider a driver who is hit at an intersection and taken to the hospital. The emergency department rules out life-threatening injuries and splints a painful foot. Orthopedic follow-up then identifies an unstable Lisfranc injury that wasn't visible on the first non-weight-bearing films. Surgery is scheduled after the surgeon evaluates the soft tissue and swelling.

For a severe Lisfranc injury, the overall recovery may take six months to a year, with an initial period of non-weight-bearing followed by progressive weight-bearing and rehabilitation. A person who works in construction, healthcare, food service, manufacturing, or another job that requires prolonged standing may be unable to perform normal duties for a substantial period. Someone with a desk job may return sooner but still need restrictions, elevation, mobility aids, or time away for treatment.

The same issue appears with severe heel and pilon fractures. Recovery isn't measured only by whether the bone has united. Chronic pain, altered gait, loss of motion, hardware problems, and post-traumatic arthritis can continue long after the initial [surgery](#). In some cases, future procedures such as fusion may become part of the treatment discussion.

Long-Term Mobility Problems Can Affect More Than Walking

A lasting foot or ankle injury can change how someone uses the entire lower extremity. A person may shift weight away from the injured side, take shorter steps, avoid uneven ground, or rely on a brace or orthotic. That altered gait can make stairs, ladders, lifting, driving, and prolonged standing difficult even after the person is technically able to walk again.

Those limitations are especially important when [leg pain after a car accident](#) interferes with a physically demanding job. The medical record should document not only pain scores but also range of motion, swelling, strength, weight-bearing tolerance, assistive devices, work restrictions, and whether the person can safely perform the tasks the job actually requires.

What Texas Law Allows You to Recover

When another party's negligence causes the crash, Texas law allows an injured person to pursue compensatory damages for proven losses. Texas defines compensatory damages to include both [economic and noneconomic damages](#), but the amount recoverable depends on the evidence, the defendants, available insurance or assets, and the injured person's share of responsibility.

Economic damages can include medical expenses, lost income, and loss of future earning capacity. In a serious foot or ankle case, that can mean emergency treatment, orthopedic care, surgery, anesthesia, imaging, physical therapy, braces or mobility devices, and reasonably necessary future treatment. Texas separately limits recovery of medical or healthcare expenses to amounts [actually paid or incurred](#) by or on behalf of the claimant.

Income loss needs the same level of proof. A person who misses work during a non-weight-bearing period may have a [lost income claim](#), while a permanent inability to return to the same type of work may support a claim for diminished earning capacity. Texas also requires proof of lost earnings and earning capacity to be presented as a net loss after reduction for income taxes under [Civil Practice and Remedies Code Section 18.091](#).

Noneconomic damages can address losses that don't come with an invoice, including physical pain, mental anguish, physical impairment, disfigurement, and loss of enjoyment of life. A permanent limp, inability to run, difficulty climbing stairs, or loss of an activity that mattered before the crash can be part of that analysis. Ordinary negligence claims arising from a motor-vehicle crash generally aren't subject to the healthcare-liability noneconomic caps that apply in medical malpractice cases, although other statutory limits can apply in particular claims.

Texas also uses a modified comparative-responsibility rule. If the injured person is found partly responsible, recoverable damages are reduced by that percentage. A claimant who is more than 50% responsible can't recover damages under [Texas's proportionate-responsibility statute](#). Smith & Hassler has also addressed [modified comparative fault in Texas personal injury claims](#) because even a relatively small fault percentage can materially change the value of a serious orthopedic case.

Documentation Has to Show the Full Arc of the Injury

The value of a serious ankle or foot case isn't captured by the first X-ray or the first surgery bill. The record should show how the injury changes over time, whether the person regains motion and strength, what work restrictions remain, and whether future care is reasonably expected.

That can include emergency records, imaging, operative reports, orthopedic follow-up, physical therapy notes, photographs of swelling or surgical scars, work restrictions, wage records, and opinions about future treatment. [Documenting injuries after a car accident](#) consistently can also help answer an insurer's argument that the condition was minor, pre-existing, or disconnected from the crash.

A symptom journal can add context that a clinic note may not capture: how long it takes to get dressed, whether the person can stand long enough to cook, what happens after a full workday, or whether [pain after a car accident](#) disrupts sleep. The goal isn't to exaggerate the injury. It's to preserve details that can otherwise disappear from memory by the time the claim is evaluated.

The same principle applies to future damages. If the treating surgeon believes arthritis, fusion, hardware removal, or another procedure may be necessary, the claim needs more than a vague possibility. Medical opinions, cost evidence, and a clear explanation of how the future care relates to the crash can help establish a defensible projection.

When Ankle and Foot Injuries Sideline You, Our Houston Attorneys Can Pursue Full Compensation

Our [Houston personal injury lawyers](#) look beyond the emergency-room bill. We consider how the injury affects walking, work, household responsibilities, recreation, future medical care, and

earning capacity, then use the medical and financial evidence to evaluate [damages](#) in the specific case.

At [Smith & Hassler](#), there are no upfront attorney's fees. We work on a contingency-fee basis, which means you don't owe us an attorney's fee unless we recover compensation for you.

If a Texas car accident left you with a serious foot or ankle injury, [contact our Houston law firm](#) for a free consultation. We can review what happened, the treatment you've received, the limitations you're facing, and what evidence may be needed to pursue the compensation the law allows.