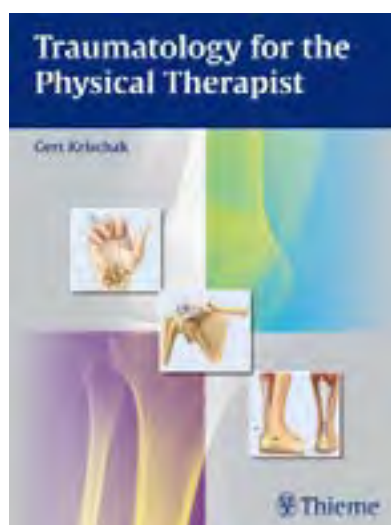




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Traumatology for the Physical Therapist



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Contents

Preface	V
List of Abbreviations	VII

Part I General Traumatology..... 3

1 Introduction	4	Fracture Healing.....	34
History of Trauma Surgery.....	4	Special Characteristics of	
Types of Accident.....	4	Children's Fractures.....	35
2 Wound Healing and Wound Treatment	6	7 Treatment of Bone Injuries	39
Wounds: Definition and Classification.....	6	General Guidelines.....	39
Forms of Wound Healing.....	8	Conservative and Surgical	
Phases of Wound Healing.....	8	Fracture Therapy.....	39
Wound Care.....	9	8 Phlebothrombosis and Embolism	50
3 Physical and Chemical Injuries	12	Phlebothrombosis.....	50
Burns.....	12	Pulmonary Artery Embolism.....	52
Cold Damage.....	15	9 Complications of Fracture Healing and	
Chemical Damage by Acids and Alkali.....	16	Treatment	53
4 Surgical Infections	18	Nonunion and Delayed Bone Healing.....	53
Wound Infections.....	18	Osteitis.....	54
Specific Infections.....	20	Compartment Syndrome.....	58
5 Soft Tissue Injuries	24	Sympathetic Reflex Dystrophy.....	60
Muscle Injuries.....	24	10 Joint Injuries	63
Tendon Injuries.....	25	Anatomical Foundation.....	63
Vascular Injuries.....	27	Types of Injury.....	63
Nerve Injuries.....	28	Glossary for General Traumatology	67
6 Fractures	31	Study Questions for	
Definition and Classification of Fractures...	31	General Traumatology	71
Diagnosis.....	33		

Part II Special Traumatology..... 75

11 Skull Injuries	76	15 Pelvic Injuries	105
Traumatic Brain Injuries.....	76	Pelvic Fractures.....	105
Cerebral Edema.....	77	Acetabulum Fractures.....	108
Intracranial Hematomas.....	78	16 Injuries to the Lower Extremities	111
Skull Fractures.....	81	Injuries to Hip and Thigh.....	111
Brain Death.....	83	Injuries of the Knee Joint.....	123
12 Spinal Injuries	84	Injuries of the Lower Leg and the Ankle....	138
Injuries of the Cervical Spine.....	84	Injuries to the Midfoot and Forefoot.....	151
Injuries of the Thoracic and		17 Injuries to the Upper Extremities	154
Lumbar Spine.....	88	Injuries to the Shoulder Girdle and	
13 Thoracic Injuries	93	Upper Arm.....	154
Injuries to the Thoracic Wall.....	93	Injuries of the Elbow.....	172
Pleural Injuries.....	95	Injuries of the Lower Arm and Wrist.....	178
Injury to the Thoracic Organs.....	97	Hand Injuries.....	185
14 Abdominal Injuries	101	Glossary for Special Traumatology	198
Blunt and Sharp Abdominal Trauma.....	101	Study Questions for	
Specific Abdominal Injuries.....	102	Special Traumatology	202
Urogenital Injuries.....	104		

Part III Multiple Trauma and First Aid.....	207
18 Multiple Trauma.....	208
Acute Phase	208
First Aid and Further Treatment	209
Surgical Multiple Trauma Care in the Hospital.....	212
Glossary for Multiple Trauma and First Aid.....	213
Study Questions for Multiple Trauma and First Aid.....	214
Bibliography	215
Index	223

Lateral Ligament Injuries

Clinical Signs

There is pain on pressure over the injured ligament, possibly in combination with effusion or soft tissue swelling.

Diagnosis

The stability is checked in extension and in 30° flexion. Whereas an isolated lateral ligament can be diagnosed by forward give in varus or valgus stress and 30° flexion, there is only forward give in extension when there is a concomitant ACL rupture. Three degrees of instability can be clinical distinguished:

- Single positive (+): give <5°
- Double positive (++): give 5 to 10°
- Triple positive (+++): give >10°

Treatment

Isolated internal and external ligament injuries are now almost always treated conservatively. For 6 weeks, an orthosis is applied that prevents rotation. Surgical reinsertion or suture of interligamentous tears is only indicated in complex ligament

injuries. Bony ligament avulsions are usually fixated with an additional plate (**Fig. 16.21**).

Aftercare

In conservative treatment of lateral ligament injuries, orthoses have taken the place of the earlier thigh cast. They permit appropriate knee joint movements (usually from 20 to 60° flexion) with partial load bearing by the leg and thus prevent distinct inactivity atrophy. The reduced weight bearing is maintained for 6 weeks.

After ligament reconstruction, patients may walk only with ground contact for 2 to 4 weeks. As in conservative therapy, a mobility-limiting orthosis (0°–20°–60°) protects the ligament reconstruction from excessive stress by tension. In the fifth and sixth weeks, partial loading with 20 kg is permitted. Complete weight bearing is usually not permitted before 6 weeks. This must be accompanied by an intensive exercise program (e.g., expanded outpatient physical therapy, EOP).

Knee Joint Dislocation

Knee joint dislocation is the most serious internal knee trauma and usually results from a high-energy impact (**Fig. 16.22**). The trauma causes dislocation of the lower leg, usually in a posterior direction.



Fig. 16.21 Therapy in complex knee joint instability. The internal ligament was refixed to the bone with a screw and a hook plate (Burri plate) (arrow) and the ligament was also attached with an anchor screw (asterisk).

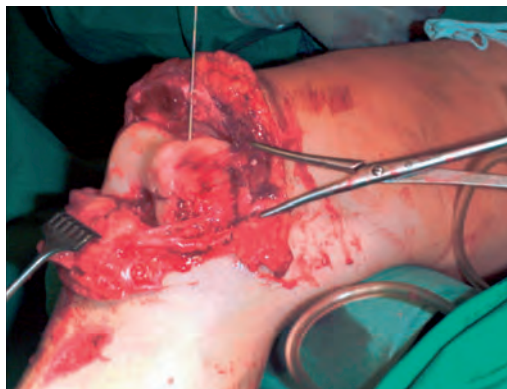


Fig. 16.22 Open knee joint dislocation.

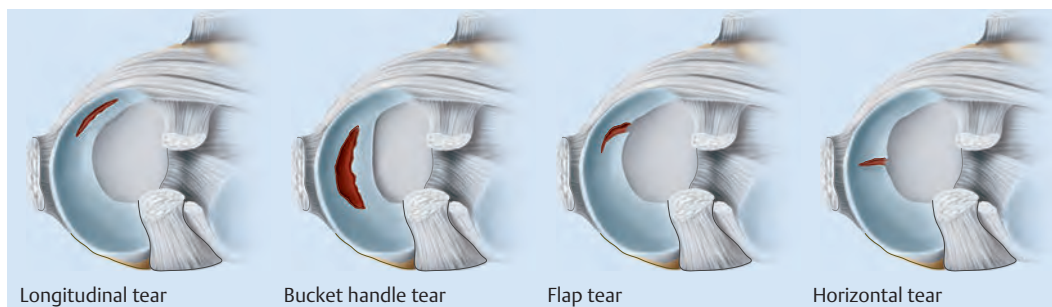


Fig. 16.23 Various forms of meniscus injury.

In addition to extensive injuries of the capsular ligaments, there are also injuries to the popliteal artery in the area of the knee joint. Thus, nerve damage is also common.

Clinical Signs

In addition to checking for obvious malalignment of the knee joint, it is also important to look for signs of ischemia in the lower leg.

Diagnosis

Radiographic examination shows grotesque malalignment of the joint components. In alert patients, motor and sensory function must be thoroughly checked in each case.

Treatment

Because complete dislocation of the knee joint by over-extension or vascular lesion leads to insufficient perfusion of the lower leg, repositioning under anesthesia must take place immediately.

After vascular reconstruction, if this is necessary, the capsule and ligaments are reconstructed. If there are other serious associated injuries, an external fixator can be used at first for temporary stabilization, with the definitive reconstruction taking place at a later date.

Aftercare

The type of aftercare is determined by the type and extent of capsular ligament injury, the operative reconstruction achieved, and the associated injuries. These can be very different for each individual case.

Meniscus Injuries

Meniscus injuries almost always occur against a background of prior degenerative damage; only 10% have an exclusively traumatic origin. This can make evaluation problematic in occupational accidents and claims for damages.

Classification

Different types can be distinguished on the basis of the shape of the tear (**Fig. 16.23**):

- Longitudinal tears
- Bucket handle tear
- Flap tear
- Horizontal tear

Because the meniscal fibers run longitudinally, longitudinal tears are common. A bucket handle tear can develop from a longitudinal tear and, when the handle is folded down, the knee can lock. Horizontal and flap tears can fold over and cause the same kind of acute symptoms.

Clinical Signs

In the longer term, patients report inability to extend the knee or the feeling that something is locking in the knee. Typically there is a localized pain in the intra-articular space with effusion and pain with terminal flexion or extension. Sometimes the mobility of the knee joint is painfully limited.

Diagnosis

Clinical Tests

There are numerous tests available for the examination:

- **Steinmann I sign:** Pain on external rotation of the tibia (for internal meniscus injury) or internal

rotation (for external meniscus injury) in 30° flexion

- **Steinmann II sign:** The point of pain travels posteriorly with increasing flexion
- **Böhler sign:** In extension, pain with valgus (external meniscus) or varus (internal meniscus) stress
- **Payr sign:** Pain at the internal meniscus when sitting cross-legged and with additional pressure of knees on the ground
- **Apley sign:** The patient is prone, the knees are flexed 90°. Pain in the intra-articular space on compression and tibial rotation (like Steinmann I).

There are many other tests. The accuracy of the tests depends on the examiner's experience and lies between 30 and 90% (Hipp et al 2002).

Imaging

Meniscal injuries cannot be visualized on radiographs. On the other hand, tears and meniscal degeneration can be visualized with MRI. The value and necessity of MRI when there is a suspicion of meniscal damage is controversial. An advantage is that associated injuries are recognized and that, where the clinical diagnosis is in doubt, imaging can confirm it in many cases. However, this method is expensive and not all meniscal damage is detected.

If clinical examination suggests meniscal damage, arthroscopy is essential. It is diagnostically more accurate than MRI.

Treatment

Because damage to the cartilage increases the more meniscus is stripped off, as much meniscus as possible should be retained.

Meniscus operations can usually be done arthroscopically. If damage cannot be repaired, the meniscus is resected. If possible, only diseased portions of the tissue are removed (partial meniscectomy). If a meniscus must be removed completely (meniscectomy), there is a risk of permanent, rapidly increasing cartilage damage. To prevent this, a meniscal replacement can be performed. The meniscus may be allogenic (from cadaver donors) or autogenic (from the patient's own body) and can be implanted with various surgical techniques.

Suture of the meniscus is particularly successful in traumatically caused longitudinal tears in areas with better blood supply, close to the edge. Currently, there is increasing argument about suture of tears near the inner edge of the meniscus, where the blood supply is less plentiful. A requirement for this procedure is an intact capsular ligament because in cases of instability the sutures have little chance of healing.

Aftercare

After (partial) resection, early functional aftercare is indicated. Partial loading of 20 kg is required for 2 weeks and then full weight bearing is permitted.

After meniscal suture, more restricted motion is indicated. It is particularly necessary to avoid shear forces acting on the meniscus. Mobility is limited to 0°–10°–70° for 4 to 6 weeks, and for the same period only partial loading of 20 kg should be permitted. Isometric muscle strengthening can be started at once.

Prognosis

After any meniscectomy, even if it is only partial, there is a risk of arthritis.

This can burden the patient with painful inflammatory effusions and limitations of motion.

Complications

If nerves or small vessels are caught in a meniscal suture, there can be persistent postoperative pain, possibly with superficial numbness. Infections and deep vein thromboses in the legs can be caused by the arthroscopy.

Patellar Fractures

Patellar fractures are caused either indirectly by sudden, unexpected flexion of the knee joint with contracted quadriceps muscle or by direct trauma. The most common injury is the dashboard injury, in which the knee hits the dashboard in a traffic accident (~30%). Falls onto a flexed knee are also typical.

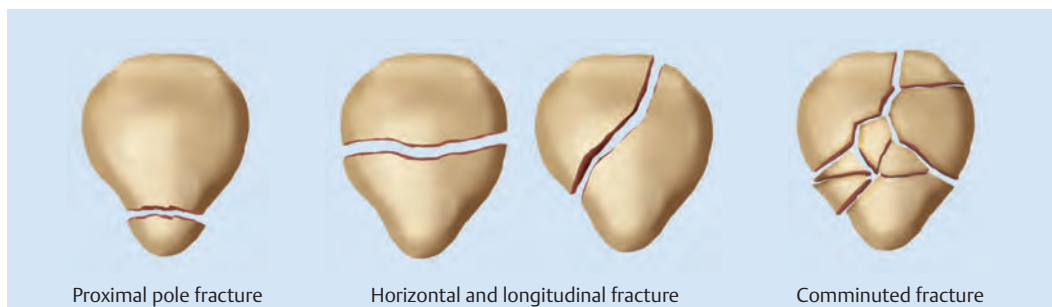


Fig. 16.24 Forms of patellar fracture.

Classification

Three types of patellar fracture can be distinguished: pole fractures (distal or proximal), simple fractures (transverse or longitudinal break), and comminuted fractures (**Fig. 16.24**).

Clinical Signs

There is marked swelling and painful impairment of extension. In dislocated fractures, a space can be palpated.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is made by radiography.

Treatment

Patellar fracture is a joint fracture. Therefore, the treatment goal is restoration of the articular surface to reduce the risk of posttraumatic arthritis.

Conservative treatment is possible if there is no dislocation and there is little danger of later dislocation of the fragments. Longitudinal fractures are not distracted by the attached muscle pulley system, so they are ideally suited for conservative treatment. This is accompanied with early functional therapy up to the pain threshold with partial loading of 20 kg for 6 weeks. For the first 2 weeks, the flexion should not exceed 90°.

All other fractures are treated operatively. In transverse fractures, fixation is with a tension band (**Fig. 16.25a, b**); in longitudinal fractures, screw

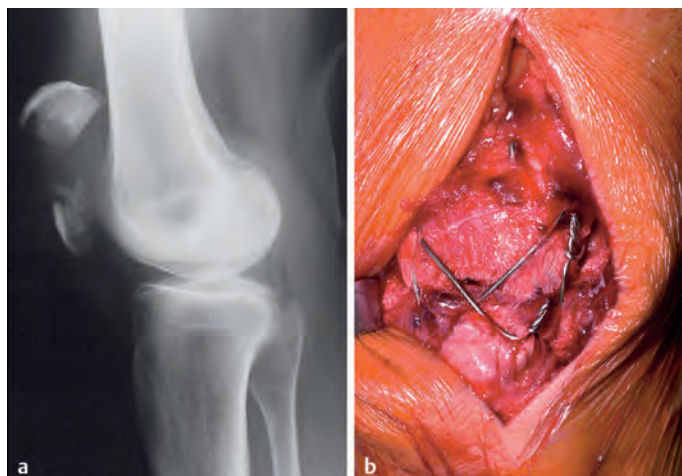


Fig. 16.25a, b Transverse patellar fracture. **a** Radiograph. **b** Intraoperative image of repair with tension banding.



Fig. 16.26a, b Bony patellar tendon avulsion of the tibial tuberosity. **a** Radiograph. **b** Radiograph after reattachment with screw; backup with McLaughlin loop.

fixation can be used. Avulsions at the poles are either reattached or, if appropriate, removed without a significant functional deficit. In multifragmentary fractures, complete removal of the patella (patellectomy) is necessary in rare cases. The extensor tendon is then adapted to the patellar tendon under tension.

If the osteosynthesis is not sufficiently stable or if, in addition, the patellar tendon is avulsed (see Chapter 5, p. 27), an additional wire loop (McLaughlin loop) is inserted between the patella and patellar tendon (**Fig. 16.26a, b**).

Case Study A deaf-mute 13-year-old boy falls in fighting for the ball while playing soccer at recess. He can no longer move his left knee, so the ambulance is called. At the emergency department, a radiograph is taken. It shows a bony avulsion of the patellar tendon attachment to the tibial tuberosity. On the next day, the avulsed tendon is reattached to the tuberosity with a screw and the tension of the tendon is offset with a McLaughlin loop. For 6 weeks, the boy may only bend his leg to a flexion of 60° and he may not bear his full weight. When the loop is removed after 6 weeks, he is no longer required to limit his motion and may bear his full weight.

Aftercare

After operative treatment, the leg should be immobilized for several days until the soft tissue is no longer swollen. Then active and passive movement is permitted. Depending on the fracture, movement is limited in the first 2 to 4 weeks to flexion not exceeding 90°. To avoid adhesions in the articular

capsule, the patient is treated with a motorized splint. Isometric strengthening exercises for the quadriceps muscle are permitted from the start; these promote fracture healing. Patients may place a partial load of 20 kg on the affected leg until the fracture is completely consolidated.

Aftercare of the conservatively treated patellar fracture is the same as for operative treatment. However, close radiographic monitoring is required to rule out dislocation.

Case Study A 67-year-old woman trips over a rug while vacuuming at home and falls on her left knee. Because she cannot stand up unaided, her husband calls for an ambulance. At the hospital, a dislocated transverse patellar fracture is diagnosed. The next day, she undergoes operative repositioning and fixation with a tension band. Postoperatively, mobility is limited with a splint. The patient is allowed to load the leg with 20 kg. For 3 weeks she is allowed to flex the knee joint to 30° and for another 2 weeks to 60°; then, until the end of the sixth week, she is allowed to flex to 90° in assistive movements. The load on the leg may only be increased after this point. Five weeks later, free mobility is achieved.

Prognosis

The course of healing is free of complications and, after 6 to 8 weeks, osseous knitting of the fracture is complete.

Complications

If it is not possible to stabilize the fracture sufficiently, muscular tension can prevent fracture healing, with the resulting formation of a nonunion.

Adhesions in the knee capsule or shortening of the muscles can cause mobility disorders (flexion contracture, impairment of extension). This can lead to pain on weight bearing. If the articular surface remains uneven, there is a risk of posttraumatic retropatellar arthritis.

Patellar Dislocation

Patellar dislocation is one of the injuries of knee extension (quadriceps tendon, patella, patellar tendon). In traumatic patellar dislocation, the patella slides laterally out of its track. Medial dislocations are uncommon. Patellar dislocation is promoted by variations in attachment of the patella (osseous malformations of the posterior surface or the femoral groove), by loose connective tissue, by a protruding patella, or by muscular imbalance with preponderance of lateral tension of the thigh musculature. Associated injuries of the lateral stabilizing ligamentous and tendinous apparatus occur, such as shear fractures of the lateral condyle or patellar fractures.

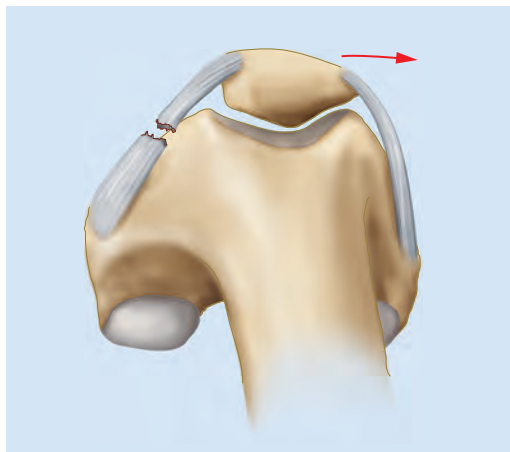


Fig. 16.27 Patellar dislocation in a lateral direction, view from above. Tear of the medial retinaculum.

Classification

In the usual patellar dislocation, the persistently recurring dislocations are typically caused by trivial injuries. A disposition for habitual dislocations is caused by anatomical changes in the patella or the femoral groove.

A difference must be made between these habitual dislocations and traumatic dislocation, which usually results from external rotation injuries. The medial retinaculum is regularly torn. The lack of medial support pulls the patella toward the outside and causes lateral dislocation (**Fig. 16.27**). If the instability persists, dislocations continue to recur; this is called relapsing traumatic patellar dislocation.

Clinical Signs

Immediately after dislocation there is often spontaneous repositioning of the patella. After the first dislocation, there is pain on pressure to the inner side of the patella in the area of the torn medial retinaculum. An articular effusion can often be palpated. The patient prevents the attempt to trigger a dislocation by lateral displacement of the (repositioned) patella by countertension and defensive position. This reaction is a typical apprehension sign.

Habitual dislocation usually causes only short-term pain. The patella is spontaneously repositioned and any articular effusion is only barely palpable.

Diagnosis

Description of the causative accident and the typical symptoms indicate patellar dislocation. Radiographs in two planes can rule out a fracture. A tear of the medial retinaculum can be demonstrated with ultrasound. Where there is a suspicion of habitual dislocation, the geometry of the leg and the muscle relationships must be closely examined. In the radiographic examination (tangential exposure of the patella), anatomical variants of the patella and the femoral groove are diagnosed. The shape of the patella determining predisposition is

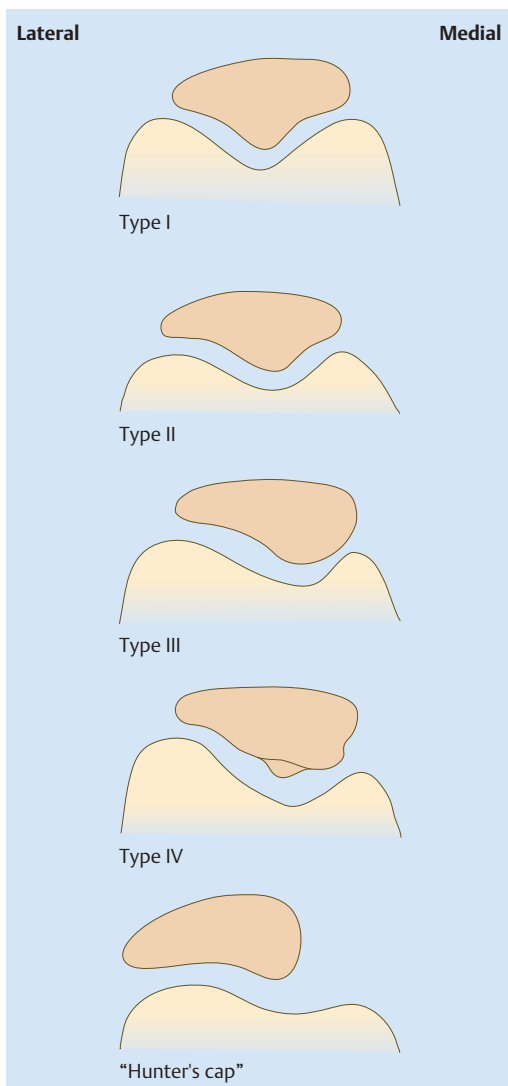


Fig. 16.28 Classification of patellar shapes according to Wiberg and Baumgartl.

described according to Wiberg and Baumgartl (1941) (Fig. 16.28):

- **Wiberg Type I:** Medial and lateral facets are of equal size and concave.
- **Wiberg Type II:** Medial facet is considerably smaller than the lateral; concave.
- **Wiberg Type III:** Medial facet is considerably smaller than the lateral; convex.

- **Wiberg Type IV:** There is a small toric, protruding patellar facet.
- A patella with a **missing facet** is called Hunter's cap.

Treatment

After a traumatic first dislocation, treatment usually begins conservatively. This means immobilization in 10° flexion with a cast or orthosis. Physical therapy is intended to prevent a repeat of dislocation.

In habitual or relapsing traumatic dislocation, only operative treatment promises good results. There are almost too many surgical options and techniques for this purpose to enumerate here. A distinction is made between procedures involving soft tissue and bone; where growth is still incomplete, only soft tissue approaches should be used.

The most common procedures can be applied individually or in combination. In soft tissue structures, the lateral retinaculum can be severed (lateral release) or the medial retinaculum can be gathered (Fig. 16.29a–d). In the pulley apparatus, procedures to medialize the attachment of the femoral musculature must be distinguished from those in which the distal attachment of the patellar tendon is medialized.

Aftercare

Aftercare depends on the procedure used and can vary greatly. The goal of conservative treatment is strengthening of the medial vastus muscle, which causes the patella to be medialized in its groove. Because of the elevated contact pressure in flexion, exercises in extension are preferable to those in flexion.

Tibial Head Fracture

Tibial head fractures are caused by compression mechanisms or the effect of shear forces. If the femoral condyle is rammed into the tibial plateau, the loose cancellous bone in the tibial head can be significantly compressed. This can cause large deformities in the substance.

Associated injuries to the capsular ligaments of the knee joint and the meniscus are common. Because of the physiological valgus position, the lateral plateau is involved approximately three times more often than the medial plateau.

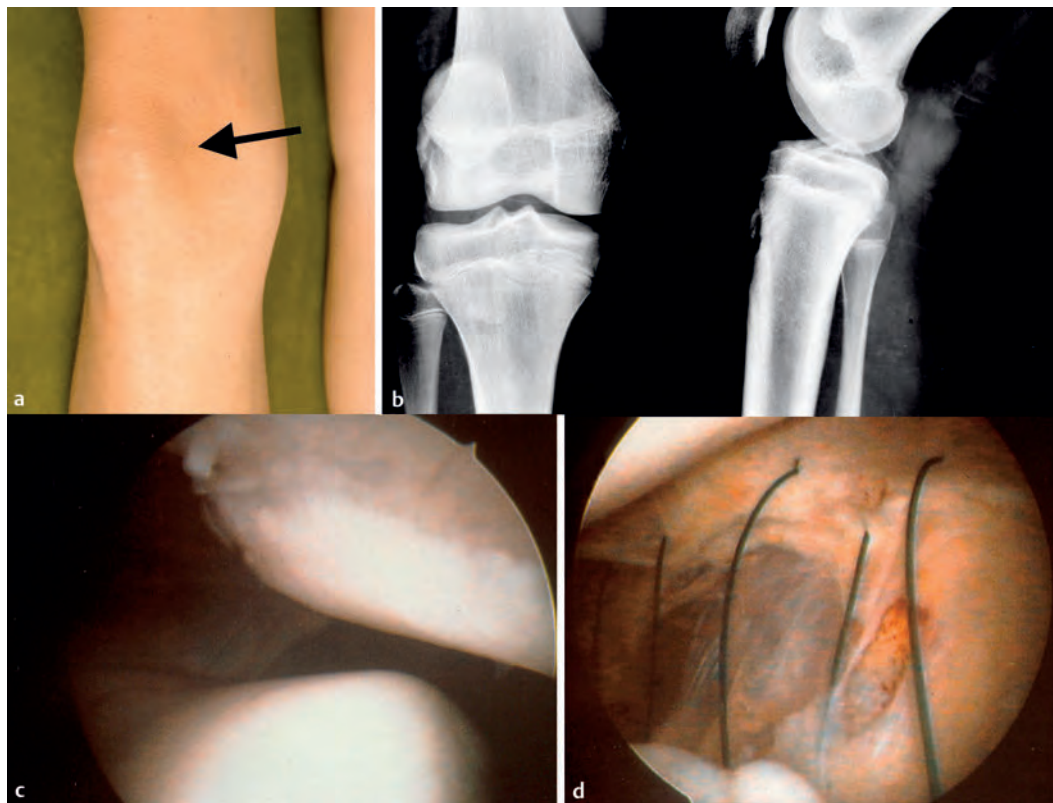


Fig. 16.29a–d Patellar dislocation and treatment. **a** Clinically unambiguous dislocation of the patella in a lateral direction

(arrow). **b** Radiograph. **c** Lateralization of the patella in arthroscopy. **d** Arthroscopic suturing of the medial retinaculum.

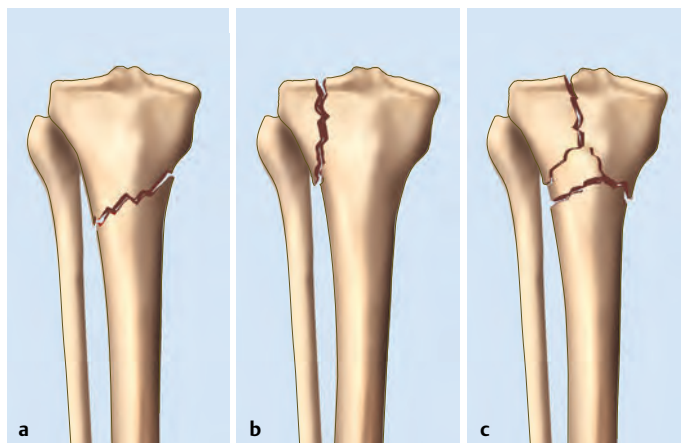


Fig. 16.30 AO classification of tibial head fractures (types A to C).

Classification

A distinction is made between extra-articular (type A) fractures and those that affect either the lateral or medial plateau (type B) or both (type C) (**Fig. 16.30**).

Clinical Signs

Notable signs are pain, swelling, and sometimes a visible deformity of the knee joint. Damage to the peroneal nerve is a possible associated injury.

In both early and late phases, a compartment syndrome may develop (see Chapter 9, p. 58).

Diagnosis

A fracture is diagnosed with radiography. CT is useful for exact evaluation of the articular surfaces and possible areas of deformity. If there is suspicion of damage to the peroneal nerve, additional neurological examinations (e.g., nerve conduction speed) are required.

Treatment

Conservative treatment is possible if there is little or no dislocation without uneven articular surfaces. In all dislocated tibial head fractures, operative treatment is indicated. The first goal of reconstruction is restoration of a smooth articular surface. In deformities of the spongiosa, relining and filling in of defects with autologous cancellous bone (spongiosaplasty) or bone substitutes is often necessary. Stabilization is obtained with spongiosa traction screws, possibly in combination with special support plates (**Fig. 16.31a, b**).

With associated severe soft tissue damage, a joint-bridging external fixator is first applied until definitive treatment is possible.

Aftercare

Until the soft tissue is consolidated, a splint is applied for a few days. After that, type A and type B fractures that have been treated operatively can receive early functional treatment with no weight bearing. In many cases, partial weight bearing at 20 kg is already permitted. The load can be increased from the sixth week; complete weight bearing is permitted after 12 weeks. Significantly longer periods are required for C fractures.

After spongiosaplasty, mechanical stress is permitted only if the freely transplanted bone tissue is revascularized and revitalized. This can usually be expected after 8 to 12 weeks. To ensure sufficient nutrition for the cartilage during this time and to prevent development of capsular adhesions, the knee joint must be provided with passive motion. At first, this is done by the physical therapist; after a few days, a motorized splint may be used. After 2 weeks, a mobility of 0°–0°–90° (extension/flexion) should have been reached.

Complications

The most common complications are deep leg vein thrombosis and compartment syndrome. In addition, because of the thin soft tissue mantle, wound healing disorders and infections are fairly common. Redislocation and implant failure occur in particular in cases of comminuted fractures. Late sequelae are posttraumatic arthritis and knee instability.



Fig. 16.31a, b Lateral tibial head fracture. **a** Radiograph. **b** Stabilization with angle-stable plate osteosynthesis.

Summary

- Injuries to the knee joint involve mainly ligaments and menisci, often in combination. The "unhappy triad" is typical, in which the ACL, the internal ligament, and the internal meniscus are damaged. Knee joint dislocation is particularly serious, tearing all the internal structures of the knee.
- Ruptures of the cruciate ligaments are typical sport injuries. Medical history and clinical tests permit a certain diagnosis that is often confirmed by modern imaging techniques (MRI). Conservative treatment is possible. However, in active patients, complete ruptures are treated operatively, chiefly with replacement tissues harvested from the patellar tendon or the tendon of the semitendinosus muscle. In principle, the operation should only be performed if the joint is not inflamed, to decrease the risk of movement disorders caused by arthrofibrosis. There are various recommendations for aftercare. The surgeon's instructions are decisive. The prognosis after a successful operation is good, but the risk of progressive arthritis often cannot be avoided.
- Isolated injuries to the lateral ligaments are almost always treated conservatively. An orthosis prevents disadvantageous stresses for a period of 6 weeks and permits limited movement of the knee joint in flexion and extension. In aftercare, physical therapy plays a major role in ensuring a good treatment outcome.
- Knee joint dislocation is chiefly caused by high-energy impact. In addition to injury to the capsular ligaments, there is often damage to the popliteal artery and to nerves. Because of the risk of poor blood supply to the lower leg, repositioning and reconstruction of blood vessels must be done as soon as possible. Additional procedures may be required for the reconstruction of injured capsular ligaments. The type of aftercare is determined by the extent of capsular ligament injury, the surgical reconstruction achieved, and the associated injuries.
- Traumatic meniscus injuries usually occur where the meniscus has previously suffered degenerative damage. Different types of tear are distinguished by their shape. Clinical tests permit diagnosis. Meniscus injuries cannot be detected on radiographs; the value and necessity of MRI are controversial. Arthroscopy permits certain diagnosis and at the same time the necessary treatment, which usually consists of sparing resection and smoothing of edges. The more meniscal tissue is resected, the greater the risk of posttraumatic arthritis. After partial resection, weight bearing can rapidly be resumed. After meniscus suturing, the joint may only bear partial weight for 4 to 6 weeks. Persistent pain after meniscal suturing suggests that small vessels or nerves have been caught in the suture.
- Patellar fracture is a joint fracture. The treatment goal is optimal reconstruction of the articular surface to diminish the risk of posttraumatic arthritis. Therefore, most treatment is operative. If the fracture is not sufficiently stabilized, there is a risk of nonunion. In spite of early functional treatment, adhesions of the knee joint capsule can cause permanent limitation of mobility. In comminuted fractures, the entire patella is sometimes removed (patellectomy).
- Patellar dislocation is promoted by patellar deformities or deformities of the femoral groove (habitual patellar dislocation). The direction of dislocation is almost always lateral. In lateral traumatic patellar dislocation, the medial retinaculum tears. Nevertheless, there is usually spontaneous repositioning. After a first dislocation, treatment is conservative. Various surgical procedures are available to treat relapsing or habitual dislocation. The goal of aftercare is always to eliminate muscular imbalance and to strengthen the pull of the medial vastus muscle on the patella.
- Tibial head fractures are usually compression fractures with associated injuries of the capsular ligaments and the menisci. Sometimes the peroneal nerve is also affected. Treatment is usually operative. If the bony defect must be filled by spongiosaplasty, the joint may not bear weight for up to 12 weeks but it must be moved.

Index

A

abdominal injuries
 blunt trauma
 101–102
 gastrointestinal tract
 103
 hepatic rupture 103
 pancreatic 103–104
 sharp trauma
 101–102
 splenic rupture
 102–103
 summary 104
 urogenital 104
 abrasion 6
 abscess 18, 18
 acceleration injuries
 84–85
 accidents 4–5
 acetabulum fractures
 108–109
 Achilles tendon rupture
 26, 26, 145–146
 acids, chemical damage
 by 16–17
 ACJ *see* acromioclavicu-
 lar joint
 ACL *see* anterior cruci-
 ate ligament
 acromioclavicular joint
 (ACJ), dislocation
 157–159
 active immunization 22
 acute phase, of multiple
 trauma 208–209
 acute respiratory
 distress syndrome
 (ARDS) 209
 AFL *see* anterior fibulo-
 talar ligament
 Aitken 36
 alkali, chemical damage
 by 16–17
 amnesia 76
 amputation 58
 injuries 195, 195–196,
 196
 anabolic metabolism 14
 anaphylactic shock 208,
 210
 anatomical neck 168
 Anderson 33, 86
 angle-stable plate 45,
 45–46, 46
 angular dislocation
 32, 32
 ankle injuries
 Achilles tendon
 rupture 26, 26,
 145–146
 calcaneus fracture
 148, 148–150, 150
 ligaments 144–145
 malleolar fractures
 141–144, 142
 summary 151
 talus fracture
 146–148, 147
 anteretrograde
 amnesia 76
 anterior column 88
 anterior cruciate
 ligament (ACL) 124,
 125
 anterior fibulotalar
 ligament (AFL) 144
 anterior tibial
 syndrome 59
 AO Foundation 33, 182
 aortic injuries 98–99
 Apley sign 130
 ARDS *see* acute
 respiratory distress
 syndrome
 Arlt repositioning 162,
 163
 arthroscopy 126, 130,
 162, 166–167
 articular effusion 65–66
 atlas fractures (C1) 85
 atraumatic dislocation
 161
 atrophic nonunion 54, 54
 avulsion 7
 fractures 31, 32

axial dislocation 32, 32
 axial misalignment 35
 axis injuries (C2) 86–87
axonotmesis 28, 28–29

B

Bankart lesion 161
 basilar skull fractures
 81–82
 Baumgartl 134
 bending fractures 31, 31
 Bennett dislocation
 fracture 188, 189
 biceps tendon rupture
 26, 26
 bimalleolar fracture
 142
 biological
 osteosynthesis 43
 biomechanical force
 transfer 47
 bite wounds 7
 blood-brain barrier 77
 blood poisoning 18
 blowout fracture 82
 blunt abdominal
 trauma 101–102
 Böhler angle 149, 149
 Böhler sign 130
 bone bruise 65
 bone injury treatment
 aftercare 39
 conservative fracture
 treatment 40–42
 general guidelines 39
 immobilization, in
 cast 40–42
 repositioning 39
 retention 39
 surgical fracture
 treatment 42–49
 bone sequester 55
 brain death 83
 bridge plates 45, 45
 bruising 64
 bone 65
 moderate TBI 76

burns *see also* chemical
 injuries, by acids or
 alkali
 classification of
 12–13
 hospital treatment
 14–15
 local damage 12–13
 systemic damage
 13–14
 treatment of 14–15
 burst fracture 89

C

calcaneus fracture 148,
 148–150, 150
 calf pinch test 145
 callus distraction 57–58
 callus formation 34
 capsular ligament
 injuries 124–125,
 190
 cardiac compressions
 210
 cardiac injuries 98
 cardiogenic shock 208,
 210
 cardiopulmonary
 resuscitation (CPR)
 210–212
 cardiovascular arrest 210
 cartilage 36
 injuries 65
 causality 4
 cemented
 osteosynthesis 44
 central fractures 146
 centralization 209
 central nervous system
 (CNS) 20
 cerclage wire 46
 cerebral edema 77–78
 cervical spine injuries
 acceleration 84–85
 atlas (C1) 85
 axis (C2) 86–87
 lower (C3–C7) 87

- chemical injuries, by
acids or alkali
16–17
- chemical wounds 7
- children
CPR in 211–212
fractures of 35–37
- chisel fracture 176
- clavicle fractures
154–156
- claw hand 29, 29
- clean wounds 9
- closed fractures 32
- closed pneumothorax
95
- closed TBI 77
- closed wounds 6
- Clostridium perfringens*
22
- Clostridium tetani* 20
- CNS *see* central nervous
system
- coagulation necroses 16
- coffin 55
- cold damage
hypothermia 16
local freezing 15–16
- collateral fibular
ligament 124
- Colles fracture 181
- colliquation necroses
16
- columnar cartilage 36
- comminuted fractures
31, 32, 176
- compartment syndrome
24, 27, 58–60
- The Comprehensive
Classification of the
Long Bones* (Müller
and AO Foundation)
33
- compression dressing
10–11
- compression fractures
31, 32
- computed tomography
(CT)
abdominal injuries
102
fractures 33
hematomas 78–80
hemothorax 97
pelvic fractures 106
- pulmonary artery
embolism 52
- spinal injury 88
- tibial head fracture
136
- concussion 76
- connection
osteosynthesis 43
- conservative treatment
40–42
- acetabulum 108–109
- ankle ligament 145
- calcaneus 149
- clavicle 155, 155
- cruciate ligament 126
- crus 138
- distal humerus 173
- distal radius 182–183
- elbow 174
- femoral head 113
- femoral neck 115
- hand 185
- humeral shaft
169–170
- humerus, proximal
168
- lower arm shaft 179
- malleolar 143
- metacarpal bones
188–189
- olecranon 175
- radius, proximal 176
- rib 94
- rotator cuff 166
- shoulder 163
- spinal 91
- talus 147
- contused wounds 7
- contusion 64
- moderate TBI 76
- of muscle 24
- convex hematoma 79
- CPR *see* cardiopulmonary
resuscitation
- cranial vault fractures 81
- cruciate ligament
ruptures 125–127
- crus fractures 138–140
- CT *see* computed
tomography
- cuboid bone fracture
151
- cuneiform bone
fractures 151
- D**
- d'Alonzo 86
- dancing patella 125
- dashboard injury 108,
113
- Davies 84
- DCP *see* dynamic
compression plate
- DCSs *see* dynamic
condylar screws
- débridement 9, 20, 33
- delayed bone healing
53–54
- Denis 88
- depression fracture 81,
81, 176
- DHS *see* dynamic hip
screw
- diaphragm rupture 99
- direct arterial injury 27
- direct nerve injury 28
- dislocations 32, 32, 64
ACJ 157–159
Bennett fracture 188,
189
elbow 173–175, 174
hip joint 111–113
knee joint 128–129
Lisfranc joint 151, 152
patellar 133, 133–134,
135
perilunar 187, 187
SCJ 156–157
shoulder 160, 161–164
- distal femoral fracture
121, 121–122, 122
- distal humerus fracture
172, 172–173, 173
- distal radius fracture
181, 181–184, 182,
183
- distorsion 63–64
- Doppler ultrasound 138
- dorsal spondylodesis
91, 91
- double-threaded screw
186, 186
- dressings, for wounds
10–11
- dynamic compression
plate (DCP) 45
- dynamic condylar
screws (DCSs) 122
- dynamic hip screw
(DHS) 48, 49, 118
- dynamic locking 47
- dynamic screw-and-
plate systems
48, 49
- dysesthesia 84
- dyspnea 52
- E**
- Effendi 86
- Egypt 4
- elbow injuries
dislocation 173–175,
174
distal humerus
fracture 172,
172–173, 173
olecranon fractures
175–176
radius fracture,
proximal 176, 177
summary 177
- elephant foot
nonunion 53
- emarginate 134
- embolism, pulmonary
artery 52
- empyema 19
joint 66
pleural 97
- endogenous osteitis
54–55
- enterococci 18
- epidural hematoma
79, 79
- epiphyseal plate
injuries 37
classification of
36–37
growth disorders
and 37
structure and function
of 35–36
treatment of 37
- erysipelas 19
- Escherichia coli* 18
- esophagus injuries 98
- Essex-Lopresti 148
- exercise stability 43
- exogenous osteitis 55
- extensor tendon injuries
193–195

external chemical injuries 16
 external fixator 47–48, 48
 external rotation test 166, 166
 exudative phase, of wound healing 8

F

facial fractures 82
 false joint *see* nonunion
 fatigue fractures 31
 FCL *see* fibulocalcaneal ligament
 femoral head
 fractures 113–114
 necrosis 117, 117
 femoral neck fractures 114, 114–117, 115
 femoral shaft fractures 119–120
 fibulocalcaneal ligament (FCL) 144
 figure-of-8 bandage 155, 155
 fingers
 fractures 189–190
 ligament injuries 190
 first aid
 cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) 210–212
 shock treatment 209–210
 first-degree burns 14
 first-degree chemical burns 16
 first-degree nerve injury (*neurapraxia*) 28, 28–29
 fissure fracture 89
 fixators
 external 47–48, 48
 halo 85, 85
 internal 49
 flake fracture 65
 flexor tendon injuries 191–193
 floating shoulder 159, 159, 160
 forefoot injuries 151–153

fourth-degree burns 14
 fractures *see also* dislocations; *specific fractures*
 of children 35–37
 clinical signs 33
 conservative treatment 40–42
 definition and classification of 31–33
 diagnosis 33
 healing 34
 imaging 33
 with loss of bone substance 31, 32
 primary healing 34, 34
 secondary healing 34, 34
 shaft, of long bones 35
 soft tissue damage in 32–33
 summary 38, 49
 surgical treatment 42–49
 types 31, 31–32
 Friedrich 9
 frontobasilar fractures 81
 frostbite 15–16
 functional positions, of upper extremity 41, 41

G

Galeazzi fracture 179, 179–180
 gangrene 22–23
 Garden 114–115
 gastrointestinal tract injuries 103
 GCS *see* Glasgow Coma Scale
 general traumatology 3
 accident types 4–5
 bone injury treatment 39–49
 chemical injuries 16–17
 complications of fracture healing and treatment 53–62

fractures 31–38
 history of trauma surgery 4
 introduction 4–5
 joint injuries 63–66
 phlebothrombosis 50–52
 physical injuries 12–17
 pulmonary artery embolism 52
 soft tissue injuries 24–30, 145–146
 surgical infections 18–23
 wound healing and treatment 6–11
 Gilchrist bandage 155, 155
 Girdlestone situation 57, 57
 Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) 77, 209
 granulation phase, of wound healing 9
 Greeks 4
 greenstick fractures 35, 35
 growth disorders 37
 gunshot wounds 7
 Gustilo 33

H

habitual dislocation 161
 halo fixator 85, 85
 hand injuries
 amputation 195–196
 finger fractures 189–190
 finger ligaments 190
 metacarpal bone fractures 188–189
 perilunar dislocation 187, 187
 scaphoid fracture 185–186
 summary 197
 tendinous 191–195
 hand of blessing 29, 29
 handworkers 4
 Hawkins 146, 165

hematomas, intracranial 78
 epidural 79, 79
 intracerebral 79, 80
 subarachnoid 79, 80
 subdural 79, 79–80
 hemothorax injuries 97
 hepatic rupture 103
 Herbert screw 186, 186
 hip injuries
 distal femoral fractures 121, 121–122, 122
 femoral head fractures 113–114
 femoral neck fractures 114, 114–117, 115
 femoral shaft fractures 119–120
 hip joint dislocation 111–113
 perthrochanteric femoral fractures 118–119
 subthrochanteric femoral fractures 118–119
 summary 123
 hip joint dislocation 111–113
 Hippocrates 4
 Hippocrates repositioning 162, 163
 hip total endoprosthesis (hip TEP) 116, 116
 humeral shaft fractures 169–171
 humerus fracture, proximal 167–169
 hybrid fixator 48, 48
 hydrocolloid dressing 11
 hyperbaric oxygen therapy 22
 hypertrophic chondrocytes 36
 hypertrophic nonunion 53, 54
 hypothermia 16
 hypovolemic shock 208, 209

I

iatrogenic wounds 7
 IC *see* integument
 closed
 iliac dislocation 111
 Ilizarov ring fixator
 48, 48
 immobilization 40–42
 immunization 22
 impaction fracture 89
 impingement tests 165,
 165
 incised wounds 6
 indirect arterial injury
 27
 indirect nerve injury
 28
 infants, CPR in
 211–212
 infections, surgical
 abscess 18
 empyema 19
 gangrene 22–23
 phlegmon 18–19
 specific 20–23
 summary 23
 tetanus 20–22
 treatment 19–20
 wound 18–20
 infraspinatus test 166
 integument closed (IC)
 33
 integument open (IO)
 33
 internal chemical
 injuries 17
 internal fixator 49
 intracerebral hematoma
 79, 80
 intracranial hematomas
 78
 epidural 79, 79
 intracerebral 79, 80
 subarachnoid 79, 80
 subdural 79, 79–80
 intramedullary nailing
 46–47
 IO *see* integument
 open
 ischemic muscle
 necroses 27
 isolated orbital floor
 fracture 82

J

Jefferson fracture 85,
 85
 Jennet 77
 Jobe test 165, 166
 joint empyema 66
 joint injuries *see also*
 knee joint injuries
 anatomical founda-
 tion 63, 63
 articular effusion
 65–66
 cartilage 65
 contusion 64
 dislocation 64
 distorsion 63–64
 fractures 65
 ligament injuries
 64, 64
 summary 66
 joint-preserving
 operations 115
 joint replacement
 operations
 115–116

K

Kirschner wires 46, 46
 Kleinert dynamic splint
 193, 193
 knee joint injuries
 anatomy 125
 bony structures
 123–124
 capsular ligament
 124–125
 cruciate ligament
 ruptures 125–127
 dislocation 128–129
 lateral ligament 128
 meniscus 129–130
 patellar dislocation
 133, 133–134, 135
 patellar fractures
 130–133, 131
 structure 124
 summary 137
 tibial head fractures
 134–136, 135
 Kocher repositioning
 162, 163
 kyphoplasty 92

L

laceration 6
 lateral dislocation 32,
 32
 lateral ligaments 124
 injuries 128
 lateral midfacial frac-
 tures 82
 laterobasilar fractures
 81
 lavage 56
 law of nines 13
 LeFort fractures 82
 leisure time accidents
 4–5
 lift-off test 166, 166
 ligament injuries 64, 64
 finger 190
 knee joint 124–128
 lateral 128
 at upper ankle
 144–145
 Lisfranc joint disloca-
 tion 151, 152
 loading stability 43
 local burn damage
 12–13
 local freezing 15–16
 locking, of medullary
 nails 47
 lockjaw *see* tetanus
 Loew 76
 longitudinal growth 35
 lower arm fracture
 178–181
 lower cervical spine
 fractures (C3–C7)
 87
 lower extremity injuries
 ankle 141–151
 forefoot 151–153
 hip 111–123
 knee joint 123–137
 lower leg 138–141,
 151
 midfoot 151–153
 thigh 111–123
 lower leg injuries
 crus fractures
 138–140
 pilon tibial fractures
 140–141
 summary 151

lumbar spine injuries
 88–92
 lung injuries 97
 luxation 64
 lymphadenitis 18
 lymphangitis (blood
 poisoning) 18
 lymphedema 51

M

maggots 10
 magnetic resonance
 imaging (MRI) 33
 cruciate ligament
 rupture 126
 joint fracture 65
 meniscus injury 130
 muscle injury 24
 pulmonary artery
 embolism 52
 Maisonneuve fracture
 142, 143
 malleolar fractures
 141–144, 142
 march fracture 151
 marrow nail with no
 boring 47
 Marti 146
 Matsen repositioning
 162, 163
 McLaughlin loop 132
 mechanical wounds 6–7
 median nerve injury
 (hand of blessing)
 29, 29
 mediastinal emphysema
 98
 mediastinitis 98
 medullary nails 46–47
 meninges 78, 78
 meniscus 124
 injuries 129–130
 metacarpal bone
 fractures 188–189
 metastases 31
 metatarsal bone
 fractures 151
 middle column 88
 midfacial fractures 82
 midfoot injuries
 151–153
 Milch repositioning
 162, 163

- mild TBI 76
 - moderate TBI 76
 - monocle hematoma 81, 81
 - monofixator 48, 48
 - Monteggia fractures 178, 178, 180–181
 - movement stability 43
 - MRI *see* magnetic resonance imaging
 - Müller, Maurice E. 33
 - multifragmentary fractures 31, 32
 - multiple trauma 207
 - acute phase 208–209
 - first aid 209–212
 - summary 213
 - surgical care 212
 - muscle injuries
 - contusions 24
 - fiber tears 24
 - myositis ossificans 25, 25
 - pulled muscles 24
 - tears 24
 - treatment of 24–25
 - muscle tests 165–166
 - myositis ossificans 25, 25
- N**
- nasal fractures 82
 - National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, U. S. 76
 - navicular bone fracture 151
 - necroses
 - coagulation 16
 - colliquation 16
 - femoral head 117, 117
 - ischemic muscle 27
 - Neer 165, 168
 - nerve injuries 28–30
 - neurapraxia 28, 28–29
 - neurogenic shock 208, 210
 - neurotmesis 28, 28–29
 - neutralization plates 45, 45
 - 90° supraspinatus test 165, 166
- nontraumatic fractures 31
 - nonunion (false joint) 53–54, 54, 156, 181
 - nosocomial infections 18
- O**
- oblique fractures 31, 31
 - obturator dislocation 112
 - odontoid fractures 86–87
 - olecranon fractures 175–176
 - one-technician model, of cardiac compressions 210
 - open fractures 33
 - open pneumothorax 95
 - open TBI 77
 - open wounds 6, 10
 - osteitis
 - amputation 58
 - callus distraction 57–58
 - chronic 55
 - classification of 54–55
 - clinical 55
 - diagnosis 55–56
 - pathogenesis 55
 - prognosis 58
 - segment resection 57–58
 - surgical removal 56–57
 - treatment of 56, 56–57
 - osteoporosis 114
 - osteosynthesis
 - biological 43
 - cemented 44
 - connection 43
 - materials 43–44
 - plate 45–46
 - screw 44, 44
- P**
- painful arc 165, 165
 - pancreatic injuries 103–104
 - paradoxical breathing 93
 - passive immunization, tetanus and 22
 - patella 124
 - dancing 125
 - dislocation 133, 133–134, 135
 - fractures 130–133, 131
 - tendon rupture 27
 - pathological fracture 31
 - Pauwels 114
 - Payr sign 130
 - PCL *see* posterior cruciate ligament
 - pelvic injuries
 - acetabulum fractures 108–109
 - pelvic fractures 105–108
 - summary 110
 - perilunar dislocation 187, 187
 - peripheral fractures 146
 - pertrochanteric femoral fractures 118–119
 - PFL *see* posterior fibulotalar ligament
 - phalanges fractures 151
 - phenprocoumon 52
 - phlebothrombosis 50–52
 - phlegmasia cerulea dolens 51
 - phlegmon 18–19
 - physical injuries
 - burns 12–15
 - cold damage 15–16
 - summary 17
 - pilon tibial fractures 140–141
 - pinless fixator 48, 48
 - Pipkin 113–114
 - plate osteosynthesis 45–46
 - pleural injuries
 - empyema 97
 - hemothorax 97
 - pneumothorax 95–96
 - pneumencephalon 81
 - pneumothorax injuries 95–96
- PNF *see* proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation
 - positional stability 43
 - posterior column 88
 - posterior cruciate ligament (PCL) 124
 - posterior fibulotalar ligament (PFL) 144
 - postthrombotic syndrome 51–52
 - primary cerebral damage 76
 - primary fracture healing 34, 34
 - primary wound healing 8, 8
 - proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation (PNF) 127
 - Proteus* 18
 - proximal humerus fracture 167–169
 - proximal radius fracture 176, 177
 - Pseudomonas* 18
 - pseudoparalysis 164
 - pubic dislocation 112
 - pulled muscles 24
 - pulmonary artery embolism 52
 - puncture wound 6
- R**
- radial nerve injury (wrist drop) 29, 29
 - radiography 168
 - conservative fracture treatment 40
 - crus fractures 138
 - distal femoral fractures 121
 - femoral shaft fractures 119
 - fractures 33
 - hip joint dislocation 112
 - lower arm shaft fracture 179
 - patellar dislocation 133
 - rotator cuff rupture 165

- radius fracture
 - distal 181, 181–184, 182, 183
 - isolated 178
 - proximal 176, 177
 - reimplantation 195–196, 196
 - relapsing traumatic
 - patellar dislocation 133
 - repair phase
 - of burns 14
 - of wound healing 9
 - repositioning 39, 162, 163
 - resorption zone 36
 - retention 39
 - retrograde amnesia 76
 - rib fractures 93–94
 - risus sardonius* 20
 - Rolando fracture 188
 - roll-glide mechanism 124
 - Röntgen, Wilhelm
 - Conrad 4
 - rotational malalign-
ment 122
 - rotator cuff rupture 164–167
- S**
- Salter/Harris 36
 - scaphoid fracture 185–186
 - scapula fractures 159–160
 - Schanz neck brace 85
 - Schanz screws 47
 - sciotic dislocation 112
 - SCJ *see* sternoclavicular joint
 - scratch wounds 7
 - screw osteosynthesis 44, 44
 - secondary cerebral damage 76
 - secondary fracture
 - healing 34, 34
 - secondary wound
 - healing 8, 8
 - second-degree burns 12, 14
 - second-degree chemical burns 16
 - second-degree nerve in-
jury (*axonotmesis*) 28, 28–29
 - segmental transport 57
 - segment resection 57–58
 - septic shock 208, 210
 - set screw 44, 44
 - severe TBI 76
 - shaft fractures
 - femoral 119–120
 - humeral 169–171
 - long bones 35
 - lower arm 178–181
 - sharp abdominal trauma 101–102
 - shock
 - burn 13
 - position 209
 - spiral 208
 - treatment 209–210
 - shoulder dislocation 160, 161–164
 - shoulder girdle injuries
 - ACJ dislocation 157–159
 - clavicle fractures 154–156
 - rotator cuff rupture 164–167
 - scapula fractures 159–160
 - SCJ dislocation 156–157
 - shoulder dislocation 160, 161–164
 - summary 171
 - six-hour rule 9
 - ski thumb 190
 - skull injuries
 - brain death 83
 - cerebral edema 77–78
 - fractures 81–82
 - intracranial hematomas 78–80
 - summary 83
 - TBIs 76–77
 - skull trepanation 4
 - Smith fracture 181
 - soft tissue, fractures
 - and 32–33
 - soft tissue injuries
 - muscle 24–25
 - nerve 28–30
 - summary 30
 - tendon 25–27, 145–146, 191–195
 - vascular 27–28
 - sonography 165
 - special abdominal injuries 102–104
 - special traumatology 75
 - abdominal injuries 101–104
 - lower extremity injuries 111–153
 - pelvic injuries 105–110
 - skull injuries 76–83
 - spinal injuries 84–92
 - thoracic injuries 93–100
 - spectacle hematoma 81, 81
 - spinal fusion *see* spondylodesis
 - spinal injuries
 - cervical spine 84–87
 - lumbar 88–92
 - summary 92
 - thoracic 88–92
 - spiral fractures 31, 31
 - splenic rupture 102–103
 - spondylodesis (spinal fusion) 91
 - sprain 63–64
 - SRD *see* sympathetic reflex dystrophy
 - stability 43
 - Staphylococcus* 18
 - static locking 47
 - Steinmann signs 129–130
 - sterile compression dressing 10–11
 - sternoclavicular joint (SCJ), dislocation 156–157
 - sternum fractures 94
 - Stone Age 4
 - Streptococcus* 18
 - subarachnoid hematoma 79, 80
 - subdural hematoma 79, 79–80
 - subscapularis test 166
 - subtrochanteric femoral fractures 118–119
 - Sudeck, Paul Hermann 60
 - surgical infections
 - abscess 18
 - empyema 19
 - gangrene 22–23
 - phlegmon 18–19
 - specific 20–23
 - summary 23
 - tetanus 20–22
 - treatment 19–20
 - wound 18–20
 - surgical neck 167
 - surgical treatment 42
 - acetabulum 109
 - ankle ligament 145
 - calcaneus 149
 - clavicle 156
 - cruciate ligament 126
 - crus 139
 - distal humerus 173
 - distal radius 183
 - dynamic screw-and-plate systems 48, 49
 - elbow 174
 - external fixator 47–48, 48
 - femoral head 113
 - femoral neck 115–116
 - hand 185
 - humeral shaft 170
 - humerus, proximal 168–169
 - internal fixator 49
 - intramedullary nailing 46–47
 - lower arm shaft 179–180
 - malleolar 143–144
 - metacarpal bones 189
 - multiple trauma 212
 - olecranon 175
 - osteosynthesis materials 43–44
 - plate osteosynthesis 45–46
 - prompt 43
 - radius, proximal 176
 - rib 94

rotator cuff 166–167
 screw osteosynthesis
 44, 44
 shoulder 163
 spinal 91
 stability 43
 talus 147
 tension banding 46
 wires 46, 46
 sympathetic reflex
 dystrophy (SRD)
 60–61
 systemic burn damage
 13–14

T

tachycardia 52
 talus fracture 146–148,
 147
 tarsal bone fractures
 152
 TBIs *see* traumatic brain
 injuries
 tears 6
 of muscle 24
 Teasdale 77
 temporary surface
 closure 10
 tendinous injuries, of
 hand 191–195
 tendon injuries
 Achilles 26, 26,
 145–146
 biceps 26, 26
 extensor 193–195
 flexor 191–193
 patellar 27
 treatments of 26–27
 tension banding 46
 tension pneumothorax
 95–96
 tetanus 20–22
 thermal wounds 7
 thigh injuries
 distal femoral
 fractures 121,
 121–122, 122
 femoral head
 fractures 113–114

femoral neck fractures
 114, 114–117, 115
 femoral shaft fractures
 119–120
 hip joint dislocation
 111–113
 pertrochanteric
 femoral fractures
 118–119
 subtrochanteric
 femoral fractures
 118–119
 summary 123
 third-degree burns 12,
 12, 14
 third-degree chemical
 burns 16
 third-degree nerve in-
 jury (*neurotmesis*)
 28, 28–29
 Thompson 145
 thoracic injuries
 aortic 98–99
 cardiac 98
 diaphragm 99
 esophagus 98
 hemothorax 96
 lungs 97
 pleural empyema 97
 pneumothorax 95–96
 rib fractures 93–94
 sternum fractures 94
 summary 100
 thoracic spine injuries
 88–92
 three-column model
 (Denis) 88, 88
 thrombectomy 51
 thrombolysis 51
 thrombosis 42
 phlebothrombosis
 50–52
 tibial head fractures
 134–136, 135
 toe fractures 151, 153
 Tönnis 76
 torus fracture 35, 35
 Tossy 157–158
 total hip replacement
 116, 116

traction 42, 42
 traction screw 44, 44
 traffic accidents 5
 transverse fractures
 31, 31
 trauma scores 209
 trauma surgery, history
 of 4
 traumatic brain injuries
 (TBIs) 76–77
 traumatic fractures 31
 traumatic myositis
 ossificans 174
 traumatic shoulder
 dislocation 161
 trepanation 4
 trismus 20
 tuberosity–joint angle
 149
 two-step aortic rupture
 98
 two-technician
 model, of cardiac
 compressions 210

U

ulna fractures 178
 ulnar nerve injury
 (claw hand)
 29, 29
 unhappy triad 125
 unilateral fixator
 (monofixator) 48,
 48
 unreamed tibial nail
 (UTN) 139
 upper arm injuries
 humeral shaft
 fractures 169–171
 humerus fracture,
 proximal 167–169
 summary 171
 upper extremity
 injuries
 elbow 172–177
 hand 185–197
 lower arm 178–181
 shoulder girdle
 154–167, 171

upper arm 167–171
 wrist 181–184
 urogenital injuries 104
 UTN *see* unreamed
 tibial nail

V

vacuum sealing 10, 10,
 33
 vascular injuries
 arterial 27
 venous 28
 venous injuries 28
 venous system and
 valves 50
 ventilation 210
 ventral spondylolysis
 91, 91
 Virchow triad 50
 Volkmann contracture
 27
 Volkmann triangle 142,
 142
 voluntary shoulder
 dislocation 161

W

Weber 124, 142
 whiplash injuries 84
 Wiberg 134
 Winterstein fracture
 188
 wires 46, 46
 work accidents 4
 wounds
 care 9–11
 chemical 7
 definition and
 classification 6–7
 dressings 10–11
 healing 8–9
 infections 18–20
 mechanical 6–7
 summary 11
 thermal 7
 treatment 6–11
 wrist drop 29
 wrist fracture 181–184