

When should I get an X-ray for my Foot or Ankle injury?

Ankle and foot injuries are common.

If you've recently hurt your ankle, you may be concerned that you have a sprained or broken ankle. Distinguishing between them can be difficult and an accurate diagnosis often requires an X-ray. Ankle sprains and fractures can present with following symptoms:

- **Pain**, especially when you put weight on the affected foot
- **Tenderness** when you touch the ankle
- **Swelling**
- **Bruising**
- **Restricted range of motion**
- **Ankle instability**
- **Popping sensation** or sound at the time of injury

Follow the Ottawa Ankle Rules

In 1992, Dr. Ian Stiell developed the Ottawa Ankle rules- simple guidelines to aid clinicians in deciding when to order an X-Ray for patients with injuries to the ankle and/or foot. The rules are as follows:

An Ankle X-Ray is only required if there is any pain in the malleolar zone (Zone A) and any of these findings:

1. Tenderness at B
2. Tenderness at C
3. Inability to take 4 steps both immediately and in the office

A Foot X-Ray is only required if there is any pain in the midfoot zone (Zone D) and any of these findings:

1. Tenderness at E
2. Tenderness at F
3. Inability to take 4 steps both immediately and in the office



References:

- Heyworth J. (2003). Ottawa ankle rules for the injured ankle. *BMJ (Clinical research ed.)*, 326(7386), 405-406. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.326.7386.405>
- Stiell, I. G., McKnight, R. D., Greenberg, G. H., McDowell, I., Nair, R. C., Wells, G. A., Johns, C., & Worthington, J. R. (1994). Implementation of the Ottawa ankle rules. *JAMA*, 271(11), 827-832.