Search outcome
Seventy eight papers found of which 70 were irrelevant and five were of insufficient quality for inclusion; the remaining papers are shown in table 1.

Comment
Two randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and one review have been listed. The better evidence is from the RCTs since both the study selection and the statistical analysis of pooled results in the quantitative review are open to criticism. Although minor complications were more common in operatively treated patients this did not affect later outcome, whereas repeat rupture and tendon lengthening occurred more often in the conservatively treated patients.

Clinical bottom line
On current evidence operative repair is preferable.


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Treating avulsion fractures of the base of the fifth metatarsal
Report by Bruce Martin, Clinical Fellow
Search checked by Kevin Mackway-Jones, Consultant

Clinical scenario
A 38 year old woman presents to the emergency department after an inversion injury of the right ankle. Clinical examination and radiography confirm that there is an avulsion fracture at the base of the fifth metatarsal.

You wonder whether immobilisation in a plaster cast is better than simple support bandaging.

Three part question
In [an adult with an avulsion fracture at the base of the fifth metatarsal] is [immobilisation in a below knee cast better than simple support bandaging] in [controlling symptoms and speeding time to functional recovery]?

Search strategy
Medline 1966 to 12/98 using the OVID interface. [(metatarsal$ AND fifth.mp) AND (exp fractures OR fracture$)] LIMIT to human and English language.

Search outcome
Eighty two papers found of which 77 were irrelevant to the study question and four were of insufficient quality for inclusion; the remaining paper is shown in table 2.

Comment
This is the only trial identified in this area and it has a number of weaknesses. Further well designed and executed studies are warranted.

Clinical bottom line
On current evidence simple support bandages are the treatment of choice.


---

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, date, and country</th>
<th>Patient group</th>
<th>Study type (level of evidence)</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Key results</th>
<th>Study weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wiener et al, 1997, USA</td>
<td>89 consecutive patients with avulsion fractures of the base of the fifth metatarsal</td>
<td>PRCT</td>
<td>Time in support</td>
<td></td>
<td>No significant difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short leg cast v soft (Jones) dressing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Modified foot score (pain, gain, function, walking distance)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No significant difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Followed up at 2, 4, 8, and 12 weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td>Time to full activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Significantly shorter in soft dressing group 33 v 46 days (p &lt; 0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time to bony healing</td>
<td></td>
<td>No significant difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No power study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not blinded. 33% drop out rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PRCT=prospective randomised controlled trial.

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Magnetic resonance imaging in acute knee haemarthrosis
Report by Ashes Mukerjee, Research Fellow
Search checked by Kevin Mackway-Jones, Consultant

Clinical scenario
A young man comes into the emergency department after sustaining a knee injury while playing football. Examination reveals a tense haemarthrosis; there is no evidence of fracture on radiography. You wonder whether magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) would be better than an arthroscopy to establish a diagnosis.

Three part question
In [young adults with acute knee haemarthrosis with no obvious fracture] is [early MRI better than arthroscopy] in [diagnosing intra-articular pathology]?
Towards evidence based emergency medicine: best BETs from the Manchester Royal Infirmary. Treating avulsion fractures of the base of the fifth metatarsal.

B Martin

*J Accid Emerg Med* 1999 16: 216
doi: 10.1136/emj.16.3.216

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://emj.bmj.com/content/16/3/216.1.citation

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