

# **Tibial Plateau Fractures:** *Evaluation, Assessment and Treatment*

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# Objectives

- Recognize the anatomy of the proximal tibia
- Describe initial evaluation and management
- Identify common fracture patterns
- Apply treatment principles and strategies
  - Partial articular fractures
  - Complete articular fractures
- Discuss rehabilitation, complications, and outcomes
- Illustrate selected tibial plateau cases

# Epidemiology

(burden of disease/cost to society)

- Tibial Plateau
  - Articular surface proximal tibia
  - +/- metaphyseal / diaphyseal extension
- Account for 1.2% of all fractures
- Lateral Plateau: 55-70% of fractures
- Medial Plateau: 10-20% of fractures
- Bicondylar Plateau: 10-30% of fractures

# Epidemiology

(burden of disease/cost to society)

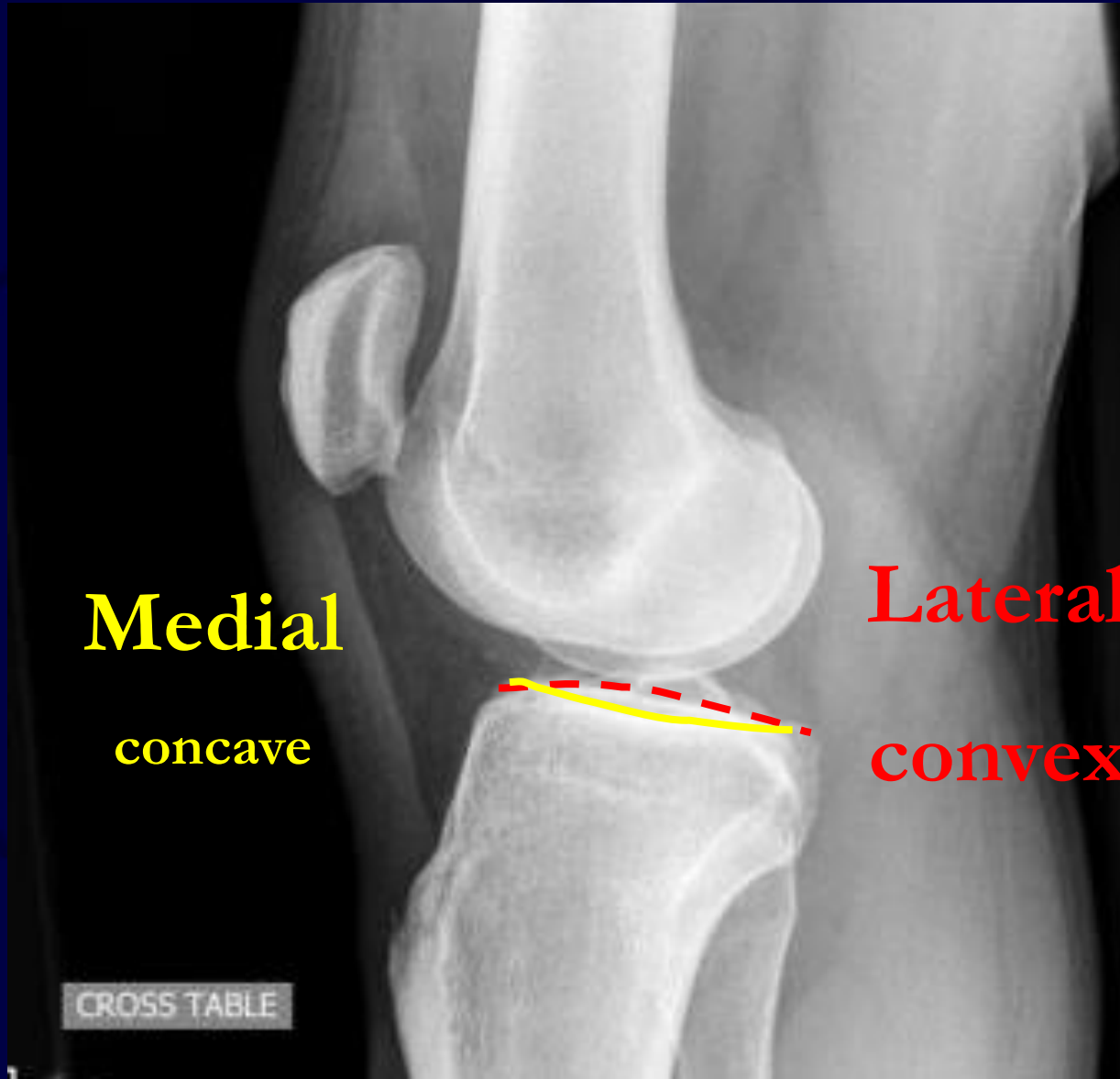
- Bimodal distribution
  - Young adults: high energy mechanism
    - Highest in 5<sup>th</sup> decade
    - Male > Female
  - Elderly: low energy mechanism
    - Osteoporotic bone
    - Female > Male
- Significant functional impairment
  - Joint incongruity, malalignment, instability
  - Post-traumatic arthritis

# Anatomy

- Consist of medial and lateral plateau
  - Medial larger
  - Medial lower (concave)
  - Medial bone harder (thus less likely to fracture)
  - Lateral higher (convex)
  - Lateral cartilage thicker (3 vs.. 4 mm)

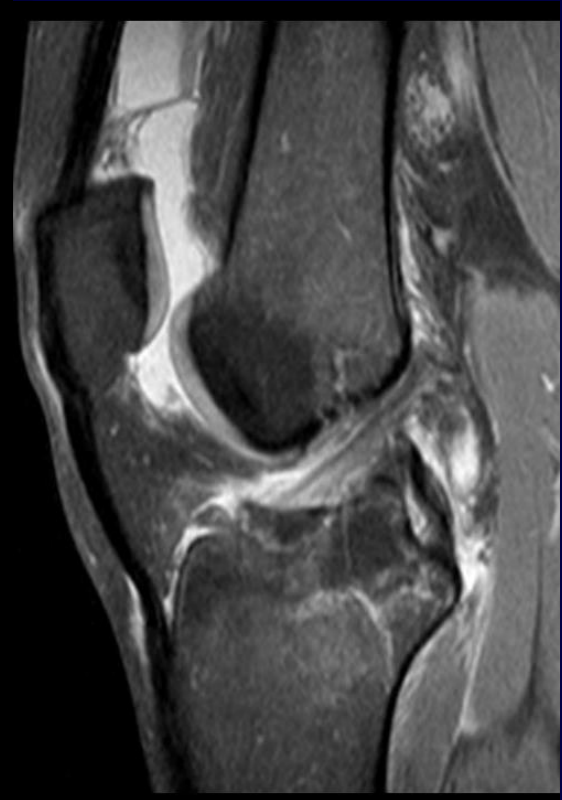


# Anatomy



# Anatomy

- Bony prominences
- Intercondylar eminence (menisci & cruciate ligaments attachment)
- Tibial tubercle (patellar tendon)
- Gerdy's tubercle (Iliotibial band)
- Tibia slope: 10 degrees posteroinferior



# Anatomy

- Lateral Meniscus
  - Larger (cover more articular surface)
  - Commonly torn with lateral plateau fracture
- Medial Meniscus
  - “C” shaped



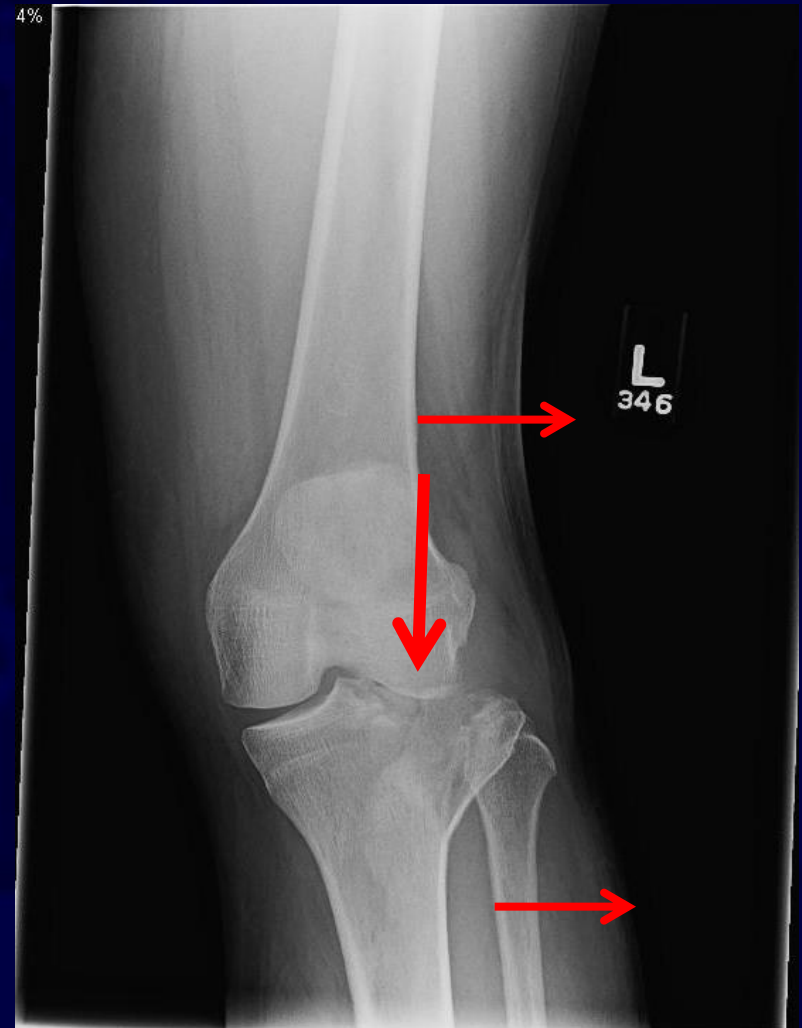
Lateral

Medial



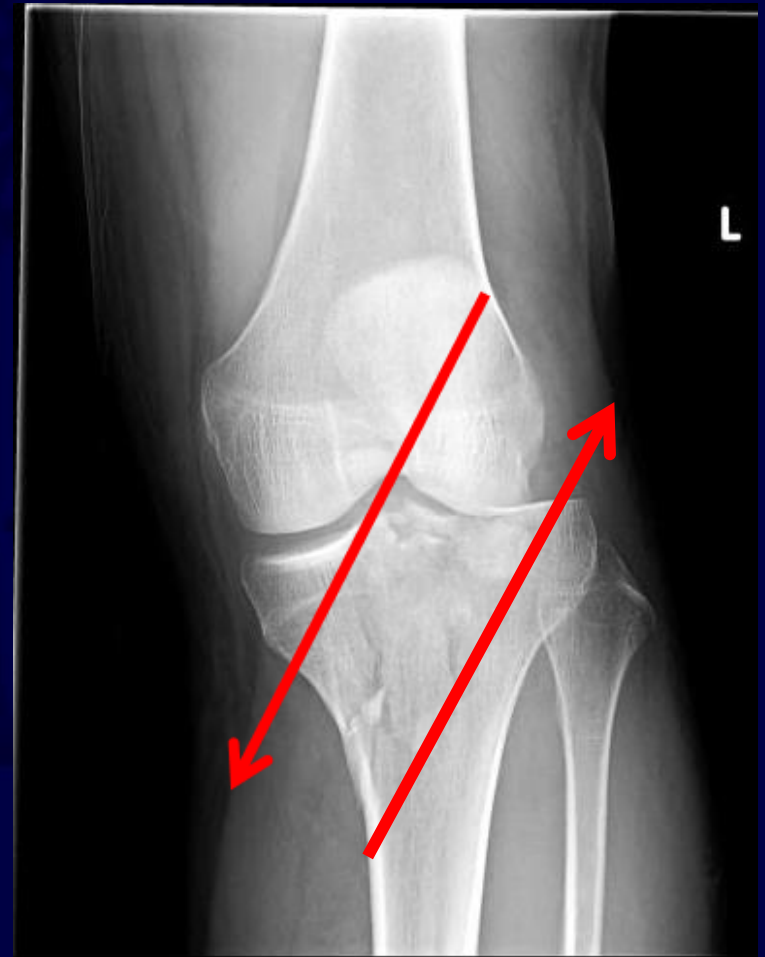
# Mechanism of Injury

- Valgus producing force
  - Lateral plateau
- Varus producing force
  - Medial plateau
- Axial compressive force
  - Bicondylar plateau
- Combination
  - High energy
  - Bicondylar plateau
  - Soft tissue injury



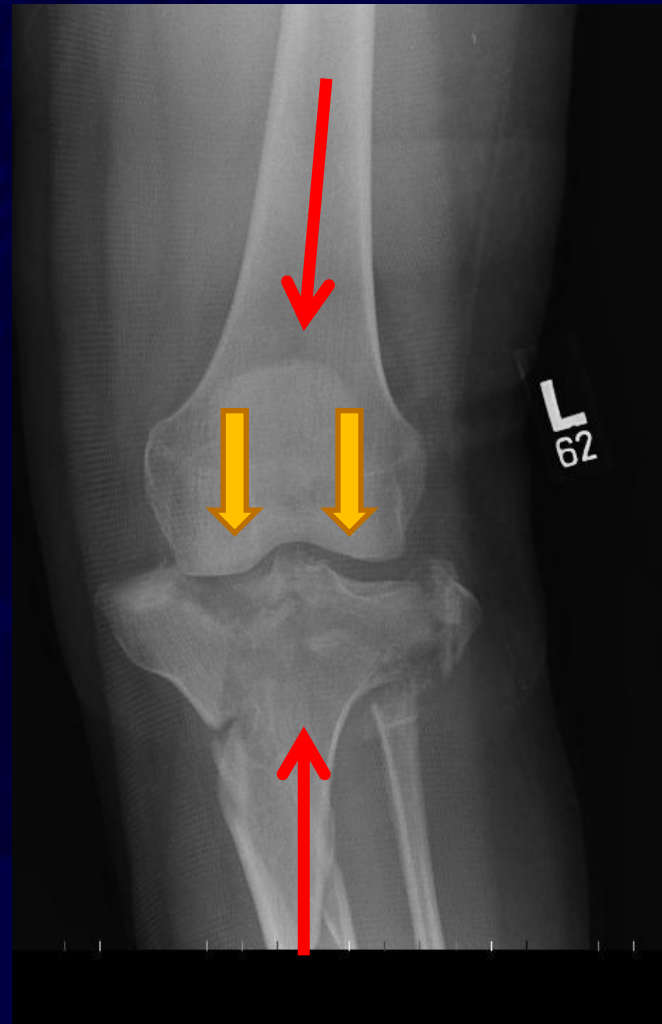
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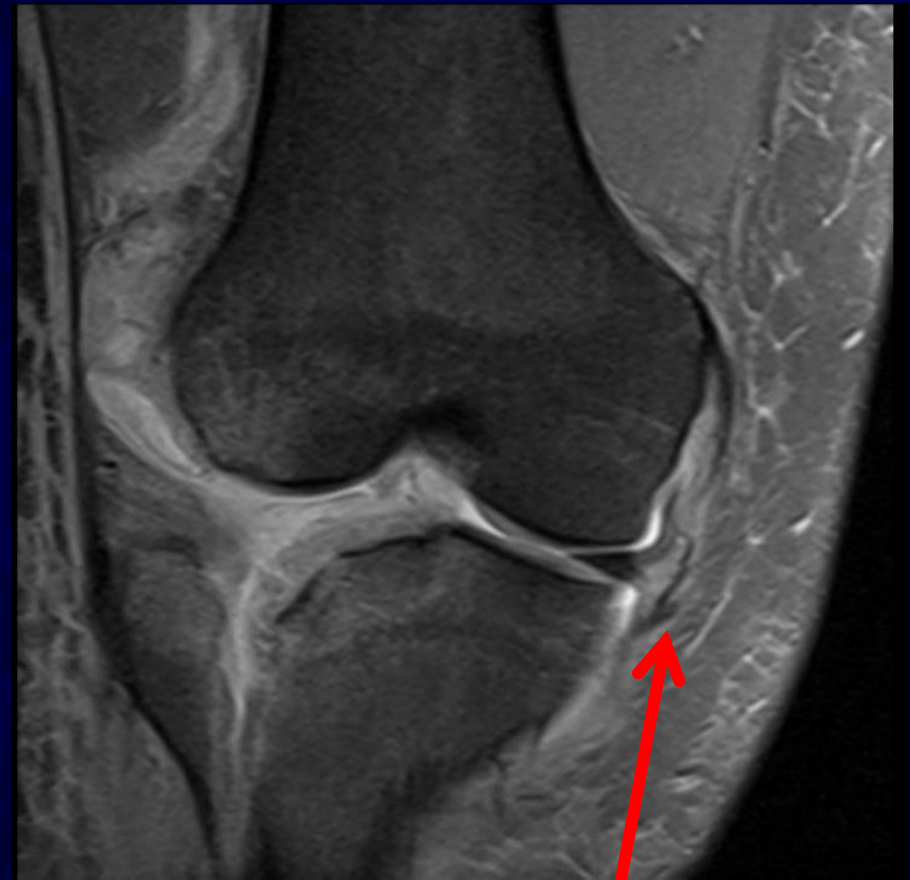
# Mechanism of Injury

- Low energy
  - Split depression
  - Increasing age
  - Poor bone quality
- High energy
  - Pedestrian vs.. car (bumper)
  - Fall from height
  - Motor vehicle accident
  - Axial load (knee extended)
  - Bicondylar fracture
  - Associated injuries



# Associated Injuries

- Ligaments
  - MCL, LCL
  - ACL, PCL
- Menisci
  - Lateral meniscus likely if:
    - > 5mm depression
    - > 6mm condylar widening
  - Gardner J Trauma 2006
- Popliteal artery
- Peroneal nerve
- Compartment syndrome



MCL tear

# Associated Injuries

- Lateral plateau
  - Tear of meniscus
  - MCL / ACL tear
- Medial Plateau
  - Fracture / dislocation variant
  - Popliteal artery injury
  - Peroneal nerve injury
- Bicondylar
  - Open injury
  - Compartment syndrome



# Evaluation - History

- Mechanism of injury
- Injury factors
  - Soft tissues
  - Fracture patterns
  - Associated injuries
- Patient factors
  - Age
  - Bone quality
  - Comorbidities
- Previous level of activity
  - Function demands



# Evaluation – Physical Exam

- Initial Inspection
  - Skin integrity
  - Soft tissue swelling
  - Open fracture
  - Gross deformity
  - Shortened limb
  - Neurovascular status
- Document the Exam!!!





# Evaluation – Physical Exam

- Low energy mechanism
- Knee swelling
- Limited knee ROM
- Tender to palpation
- Able to assess knee stability
  - Varus/valgus stress
  - 0 and 30 degrees
  - Lachman's exam for ACL deficiency

# Evaluation – Physical Exam

- High energy mechanism
- Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS)
  - Resuscitation
  - Limb threatened
- Soft tissue integrity
  - Open fracture
  - Abrasions
  - Blisters
- Compartment syndrome
- Knee stability exam
  - Difficult to perform



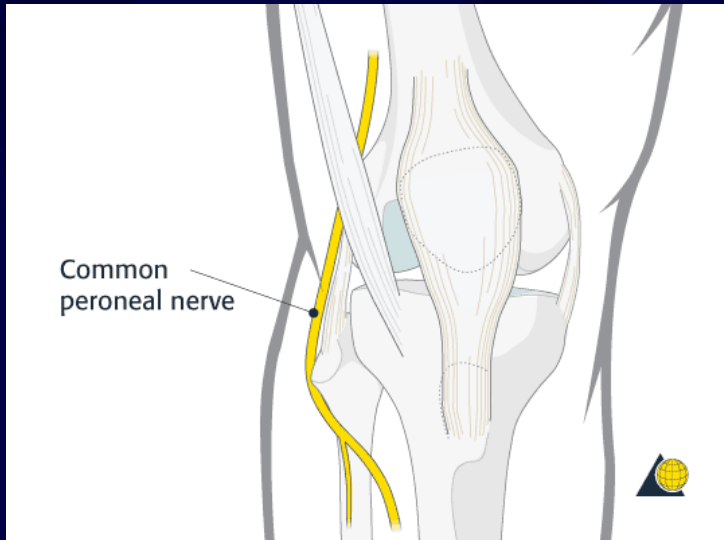
# Evaluation – Physical Exam

- Soft tissue assessment
- Know
  - Gustilo & Anderson open fractures classification
  - Tscherne - closed fractures classification
- Avoid missing compartment syndrome
- Determine timing of surgery
  - Skin wrinkles present?



# Evaluation – Physical Exam

- Document NV status
- Neurologic
  - Peroneal nerve
- Vascular
  - Ankle-Brachial Index
  - $ABI > 0.9$



# Evaluation – Physical Exam

- **ABI**
- Screening test
  - LE injuries with concerns for vascular injury
- Obtain systolic pressure
  - Uninjured upper extremity (Brachial)
  - Injured LE limb (Ankle)
  - BP cuff just proximal to the ankle
  - DP or PT pulse



# Evaluation – Physical Exam

- ABI < 0.90
    - Predictable of arterial injury
    - Vascular consult
    - Proceed with arteriogram
  - ABI > 0.90
    - Admit for observation
    - Followed with serial noninvasive exam
- Johansen et al J Trauma
    - Injured Extremities
    - ABI
    - Sensitivity = 95%
    - Specificity = 97%
  - Mills et al J Trauma 2004
    - Knee dislocation
    - ABI
    - Sensitivity and Specificity = 100%

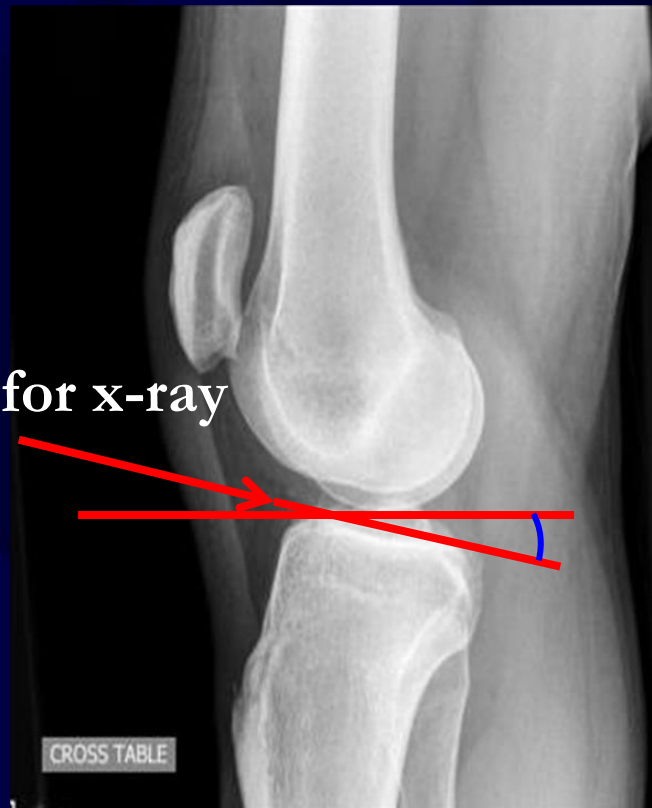
# Evaluation - Radiographic

- Plain X-ray knee/tibia
  - AP
  - Lateral
  - Obliques of knee
  - Internal or external rotation



# Evaluation - Radiographic

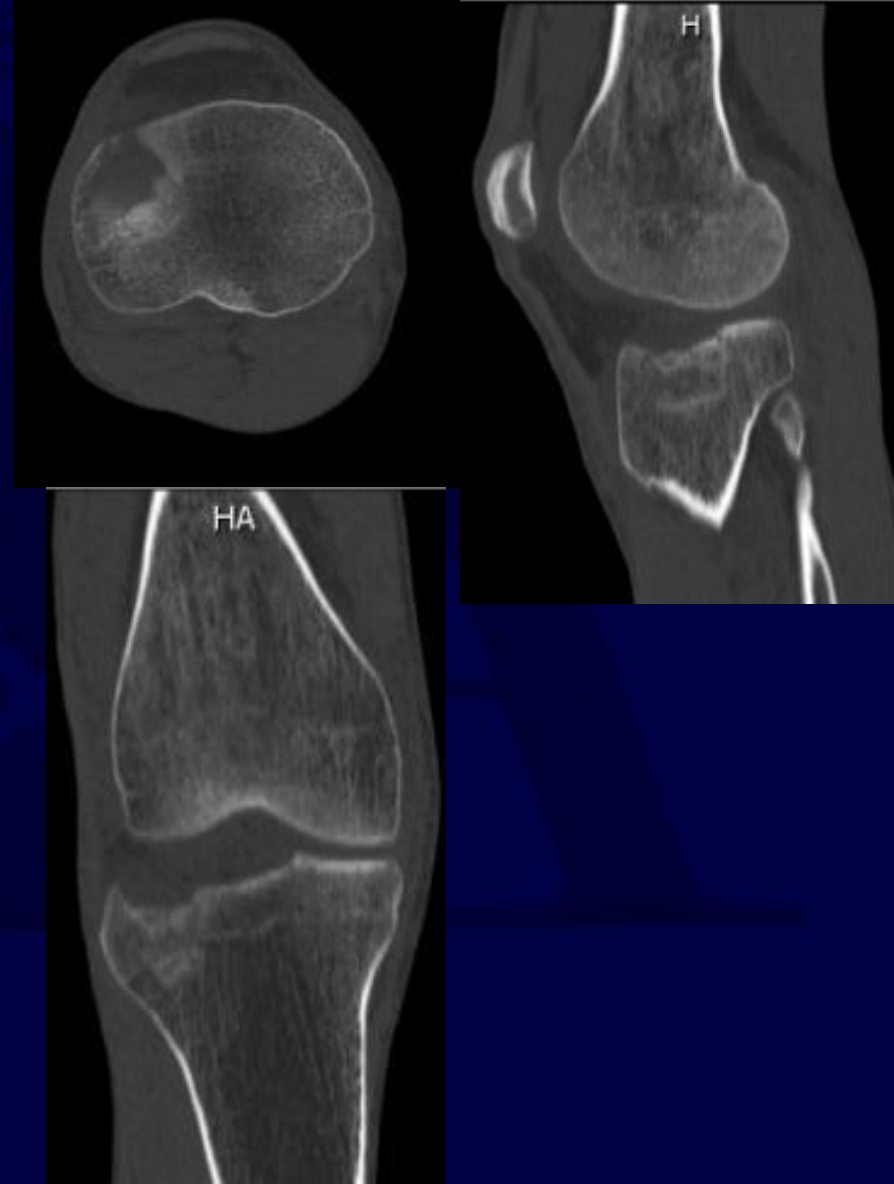
- Tibial plateau view
- Normal tibial slope
  - 10 degrees posteroinferior





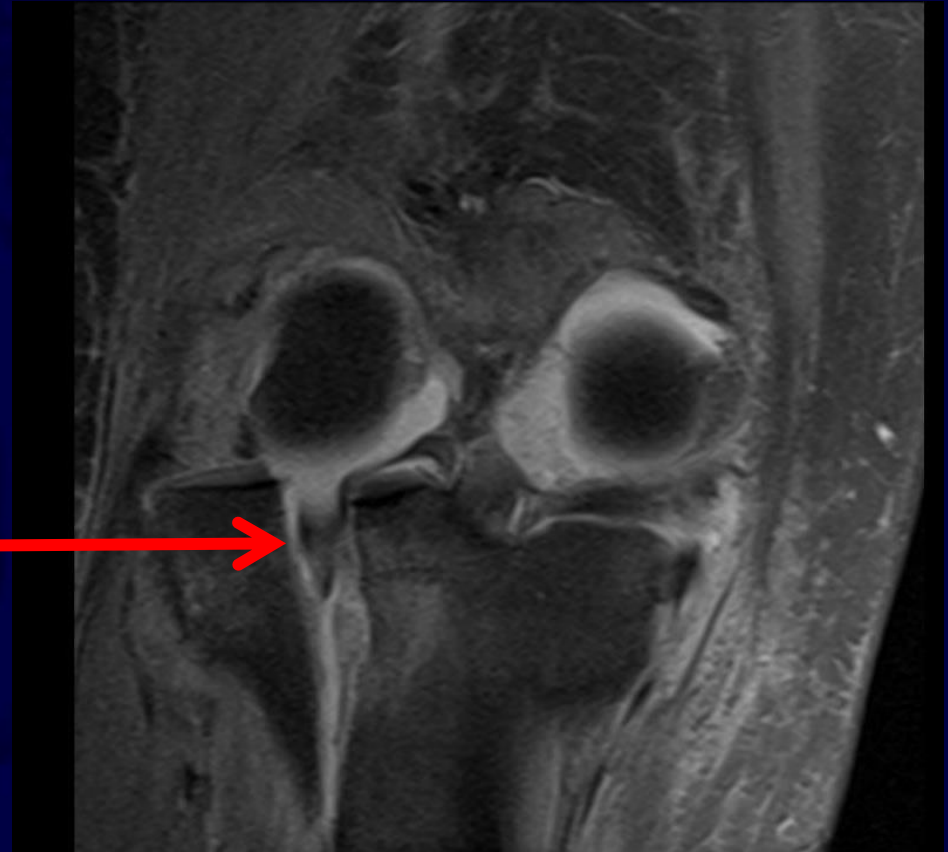
# Evaluation - Radiographic

- CT scan
  - Surgical consideration exists
  - Complex fractures to assist in surgical planning
  - Assessing
    - Depression
    - Comminution
    - Fracture line (coronal split-medial side with bicondylar plateau)
- Obtain CT after applying traction (ex fix)



# Evaluation - Radiographic

- MRI scan?
- Subtle nondisplaced fracture line
- Gardner JOT 2005
- Noted high associated soft tissue injuries
  - Lat. meniscus: 91%
  - Med. Meniscus 44%
  - ACL
  - PCL



# Classification

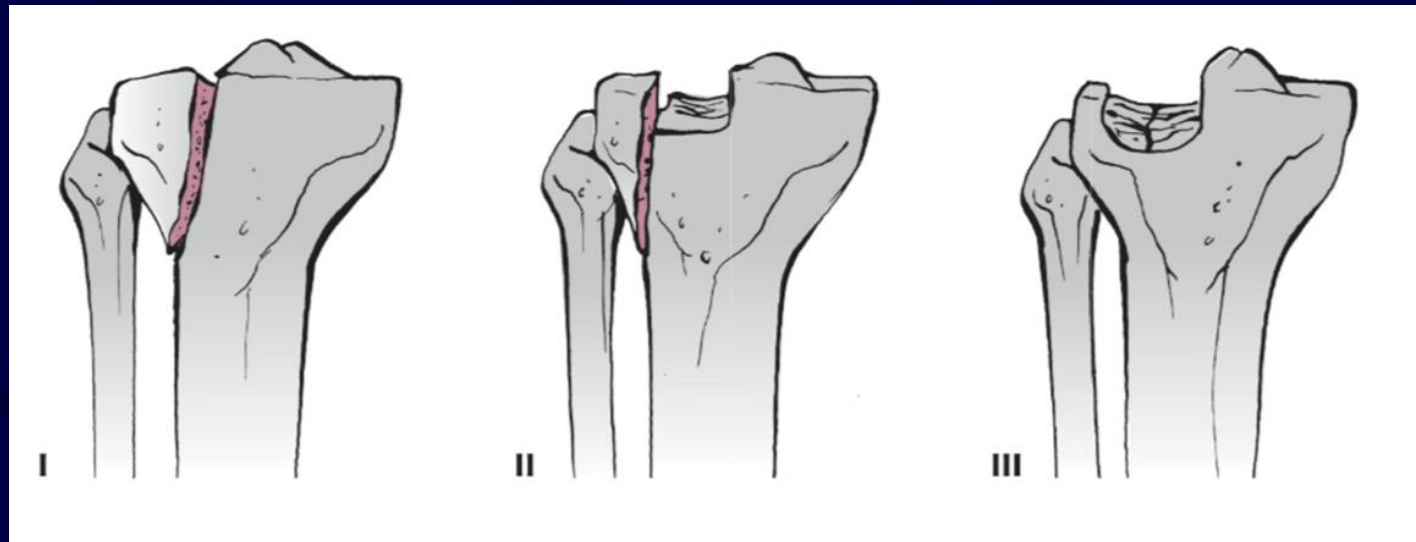
- **Schatzker**
- Type I: Split fracture of the lateral plateau
- Type II: Split depression fracture of the lateral plateau
- Type III: Pure depression fracture of the lateral plateau
- Type IV: Medial plateau (possible fracture / dislocation)
- Type V: Bicondylar plateau fracture
- Type VI: Plateau fracture with metaphyseal / diaphyseal dissociation

# Classification

- **AO / OTA** (41- Proximal section)
- Type A: Extraarticular fracture (41-A)
- Type B: Partial articular fracture (41-B)
  - B1: Pure split
  - B2: Pure depression
  - B3: Split depression
- Type C: Complete Articular fracture (41-C)
  - C1: Simple articular, Simple metaphyseal
  - C2: Simple articular, Multi-fragmentary metaphyseal
  - C3: Multifragmentary articular

# Classification

- Unicondylar fracture
- Schatzker I, II, III
- AO/OTA (41-B)
  - Partial articular



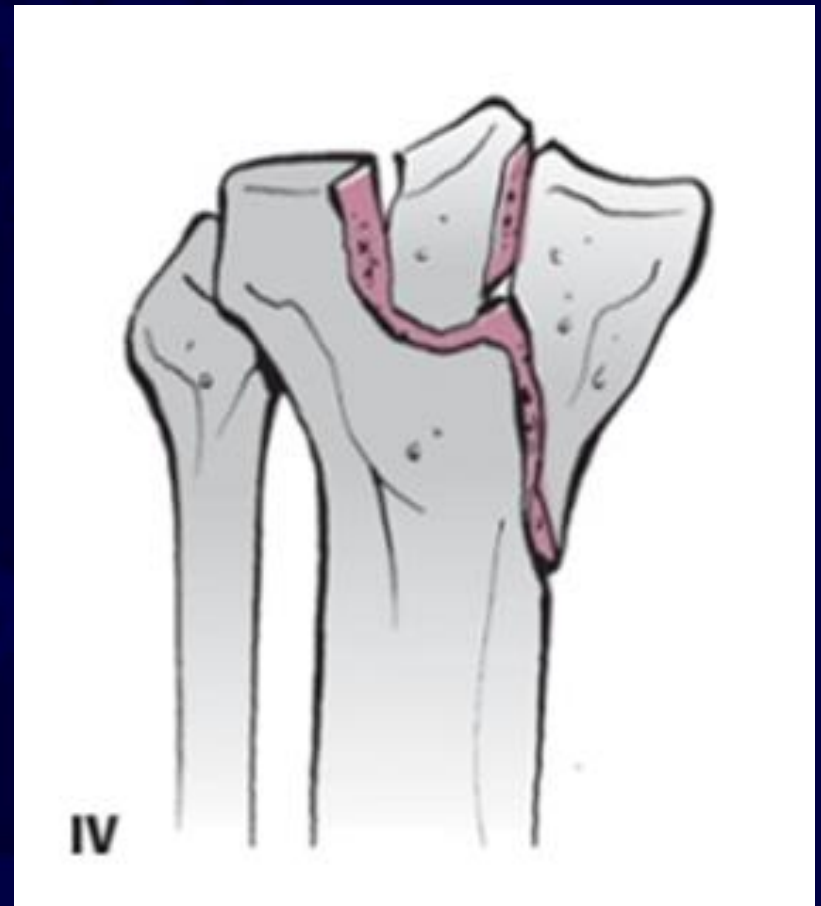
I  
Split

II  
Split-depression

III  
Central depression

# Classification

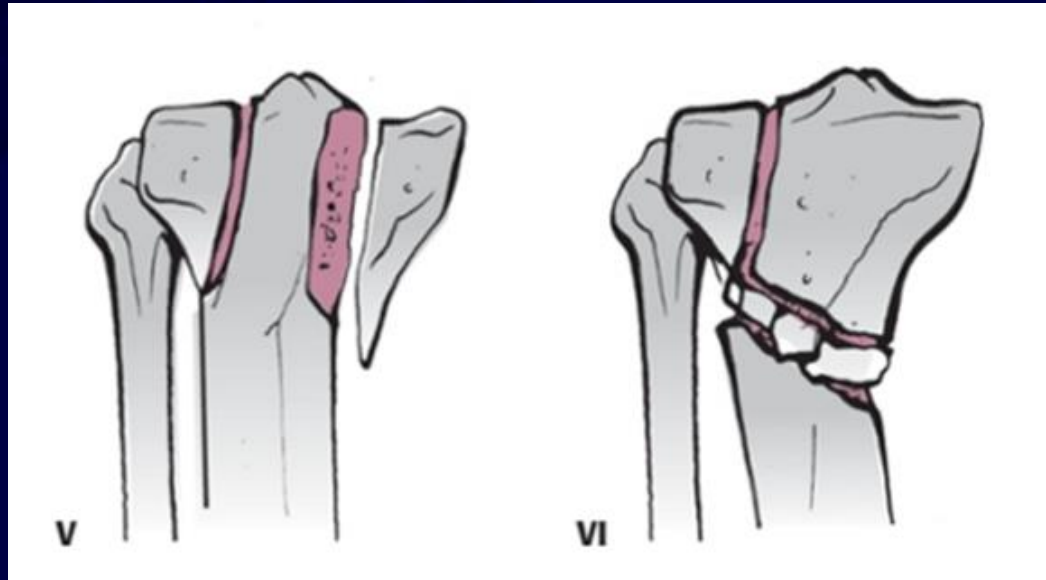
- Unicondylar fracture
- Schatzker IV
- AO/OTA (41-B)
  - Partial articular
  - Medial plateau
  - Fracture / dislocation
  - Displaced, higher energy
  - Vascular injury concern



Split fracture, medial plateau

# Classification

- Bicondylar fracture
- Schatzker V, VI
  - V: Medial tibial plateau split and Lateral split depression
  - VI: Plateau with metadiaphyseal dissociation
- AO/OTA (41-C)
  - Complete articular



Bicondylar fracture

Metadiaphyseal dissociation

# Treatment Principles

- Soft tissue management
  - Surgical timing is important
  - Wrinkles in the skin
- Temporary Stabilization
  - Staged protocol
  - Barei et al. JOT 2004
  - Egol et al. JOT 2005





# Treatment Principles

- Anatomic reduction of articular surface
  - Obtain and maintain
- Reduce condylar width
- Address meniscal injuries
- Restore mechanical axis
  - metadiaphysis
- Stable fixation
- Early ROM



# Treatment Options: Nonsurgical

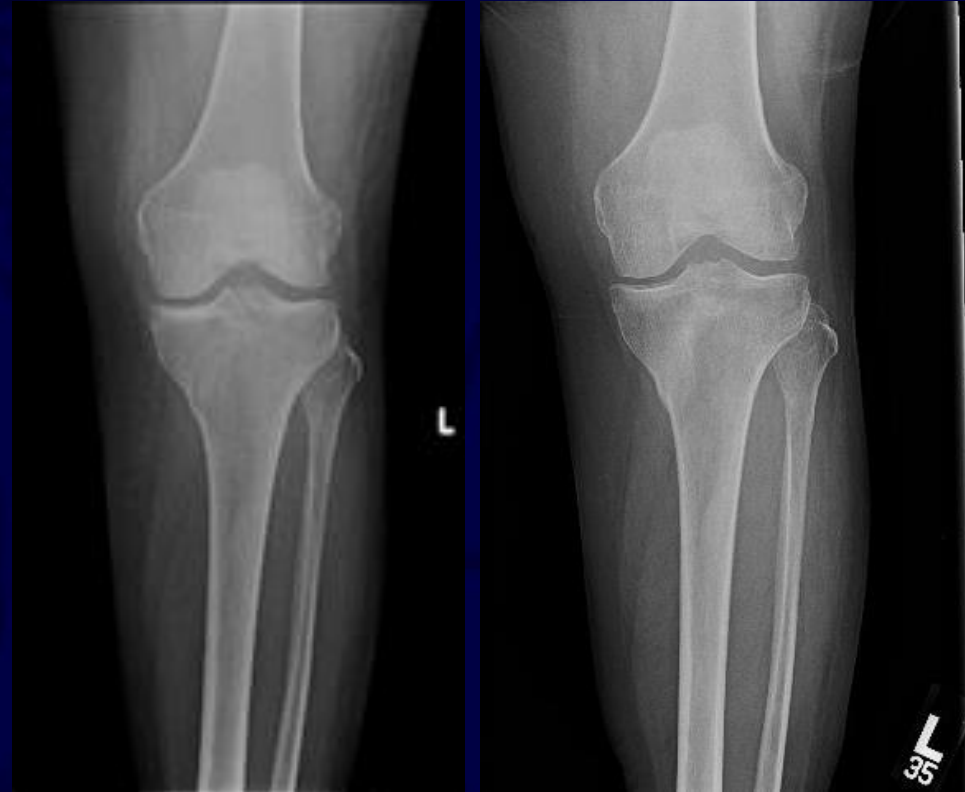
- Patient factors
  - Elderly
  - Nonambulatory
  - Pre-existing arthritis
- Injury factors
  - Articular incongruity
  - <5 mm, elderly, sedentary activity
  - Stable Varus / Valgus stress
    - < 5 -10 degrees instability



71 y/o male, multiple med. comorbidities

# Nonsurgical – Technical Pearls

- Immobilize 1-2 weeks
- Knee immobilizer or hinge knee brace
  - Locked in extension
- Start ROM
  - Controlled motion
  - Start 0-30 degrees and advance as tolerated
  - Goal- 90 degrees at 4wks
- NWB 6-8 weeks



Radiographic F/U  
Weekly for first 3 weeks

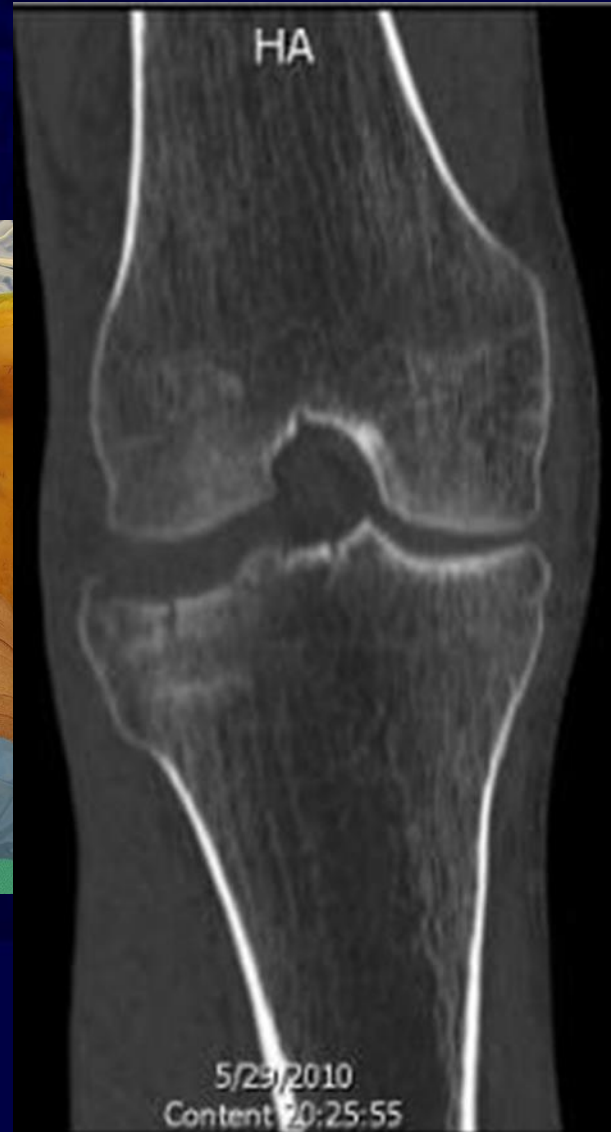
# Indications for Surgery

- Absolute indications
- Open tibial plateau
- Associated compartment syndrome
- Associated vascular injury



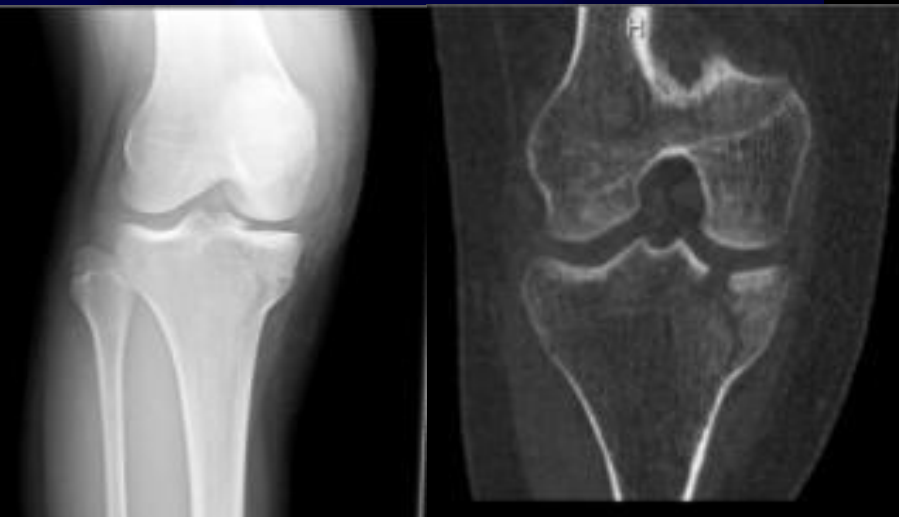
# Indications for Surgery

- Relative indications
- Axial malalignment
  - Instability in full extension
- Articular incongruity
  - $>3\text{mm}$  in young, active
- Condyle widening



# Indications for Surgery

- Displaced bicondylar
- Most if not all medial plateau



# Timing of Surgery



**Low Energy:**  
Fixed electively and early



**High Energy:**  
Be patience

# Temporary External Fixation

- Knee spanning external fixation
- Ligamentotaxis
- Improve fracture fragment gross alignment
  - Length and alignment
- Minimize further damage to articular surface
- Soft tissue assessment and wound care





# Temporary External Fixation

- Candidates for external fixation
  - Axially unstable tibial plateau fracture
    - Bicondylar fracture
    - Schatzker type V and VI
  - Fracture / Dislocation
    - Schatzker type IV



# External Fixation: Patient set up

- Supine
- Radiolucent operating table
- C-arm fluoroscope
  - Contralateral side
- Sterile towel bump
  - Allow 5-10 degrees knee flexion
- 2 pins in femur
  - Anterior or lateral
- 2 pins in tibia
  - Antero-medial



# Implants – External Fixation

- Large external fixator system
- 5 mm half threaded schanz pins
  - Self drilling
  - Different length available
- Connecting rods and Clamps
- Compressive dressing
  - Ext. fix sponges
  - Retention clip



# External Fixation - Pearls

- Mark knee joint and fracture sites
- Schanz pins placement out of zone of future surgical incisions
- Pre-drilling for good bone quality
- Avoid skin tension by pins
- Pin spread to improve construct stability



# External Fixation - Pearls

- Placement of metal clamps
  - Away from knee joint and fracture zone
  - Allows better imaging
- Padded prefabricated posterior splint
  - Offload heel
- Compressive dressing
  - Stabilize pin-skin interface
  - Minimize pin-skin motion



# Temporary Stabilization-Case Example

- Staged protocol
  - Knee spanning external fixation
  - Restore length, alignment, rotation
- Definitive ORIF 10-21 days
- Wait for soft tissue
- CT scan
- Preop plan



# ORIF- Patient Set Up

- Radiolucent operating table
- C- arm fluoroscope
  - Contralateral side of injured limb
  - Exception: Medial plateau- ipsilateral side
- Buttock bump
- Tourniquet
- Extremity positioners
  - Sterile towel bump
  - Leg ramp
  - Radiolucent for imaging



# Patient Set Up- Technical Pearls



- IV bag pump-  
buttock bump
  - Deflated allows  
easier access to  
posteromedial tibia



# Patient Set Up- Technical Pearls



- IV bag pump-buttock bump
  - Inflated allows neutral leg alignment for anterolateral approach

# ORIF- Equipment

- Headlamps
- Femoral distractor
- Osteotomes
- Bone tamps
- Fracture reduction instruments
- K-wires



# ORIF- Implant options

- Unicondylar fracture
- Conventional non-locking plate
  - “L” or “T” plate
  - Buttress
- Pre-contoured periarticular plates
- Raft screws alone
  - 3.5mm or 4.5mm
- Locking plate
  - Osteoporotic bone



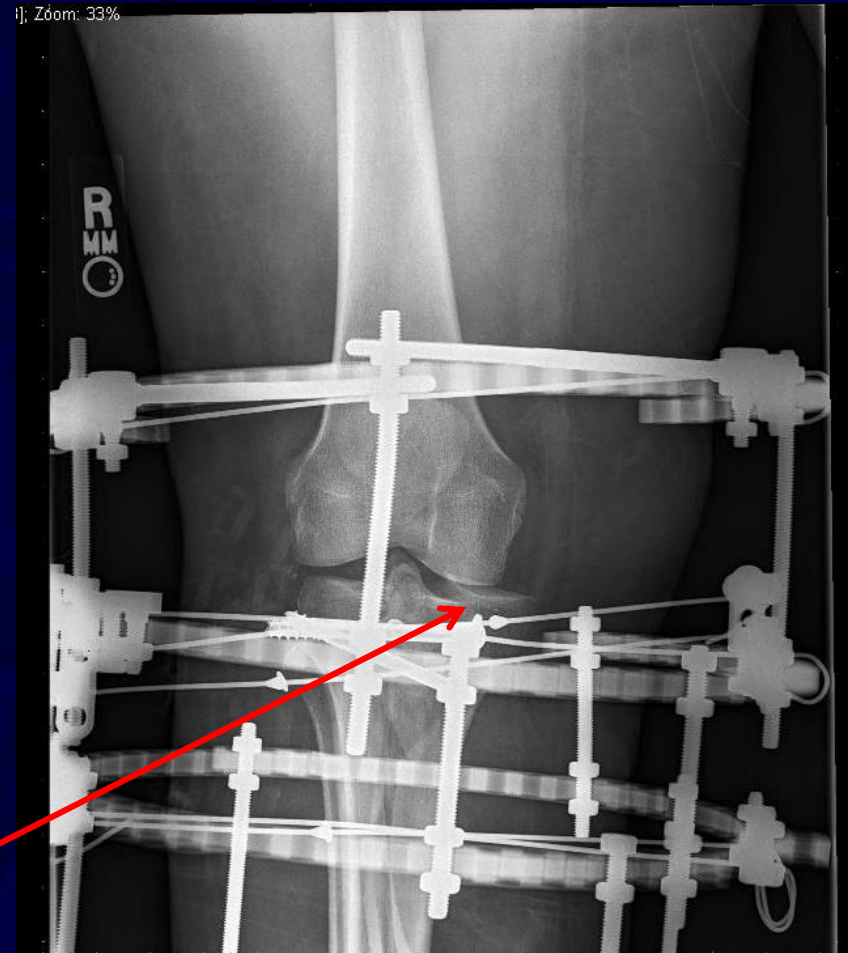
# ORIF- Implant Options

- Angular stable (Locking) implants
- Precontour for proximal tibia
- Bicondylar tibia plateau with metadiaphyseal involvement
- Spanning or bridging across fracture zone
- Selected fracture, allows stabilization of medial plateau



# External Fixation

- Limited internal fixation
  - Small incisions or percutaneous
- Thin-wire ring fixators
  - Connect to the shaft
  - Fixation distally with 5mm half-pins
- Advantages
  - Minimize soft tissue injury
- Still need to reduce articular surface!!!



# ORIF- Fixation Summary

- Fixation based on fracture type
- Type I, II, III: Buttress plates with raft screws
- Type IV: Medial plate (buttress)
  - Be cognizant of any impaction of lateral joint line
- Type V, VI:
  - Important to understand plate function
  - Pattern dictates fixation
  - Single lateral base fixed angle implant
  - Dual plating (lateral and posteromedial)

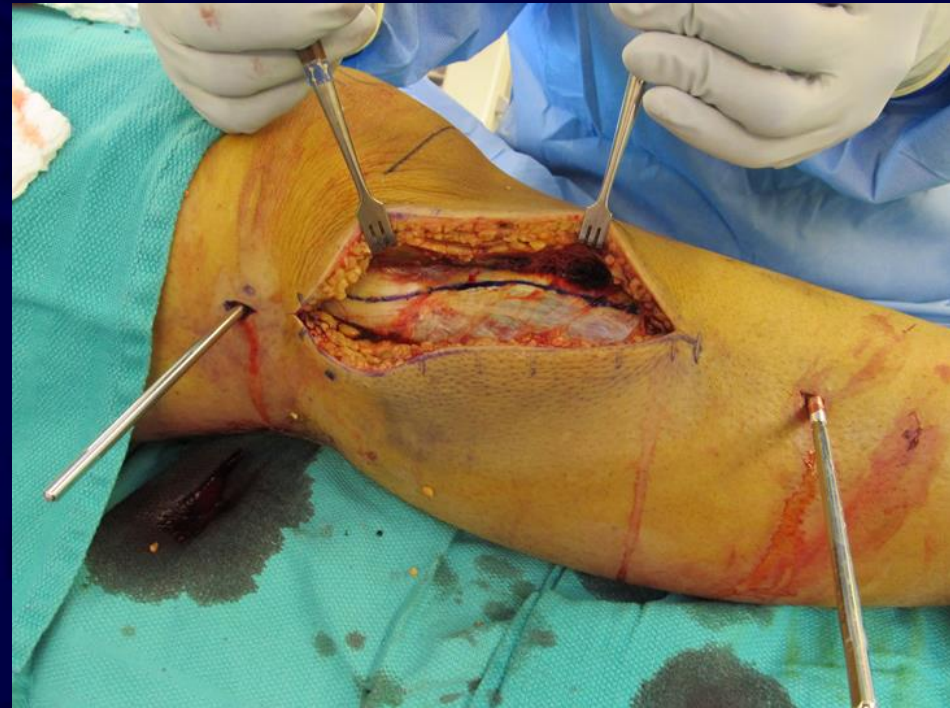
# Surgical Approaches

- Anterolateral
  - Lateral plateau involvement
  - Combination with medial for complex plateau
- Posteromedial
  - Medial plateau
  - Coronal split
- Posterior
- Dual approaches
  - Anterolateral
  - Posteromedial



# Surgical Approach: Anterolateral

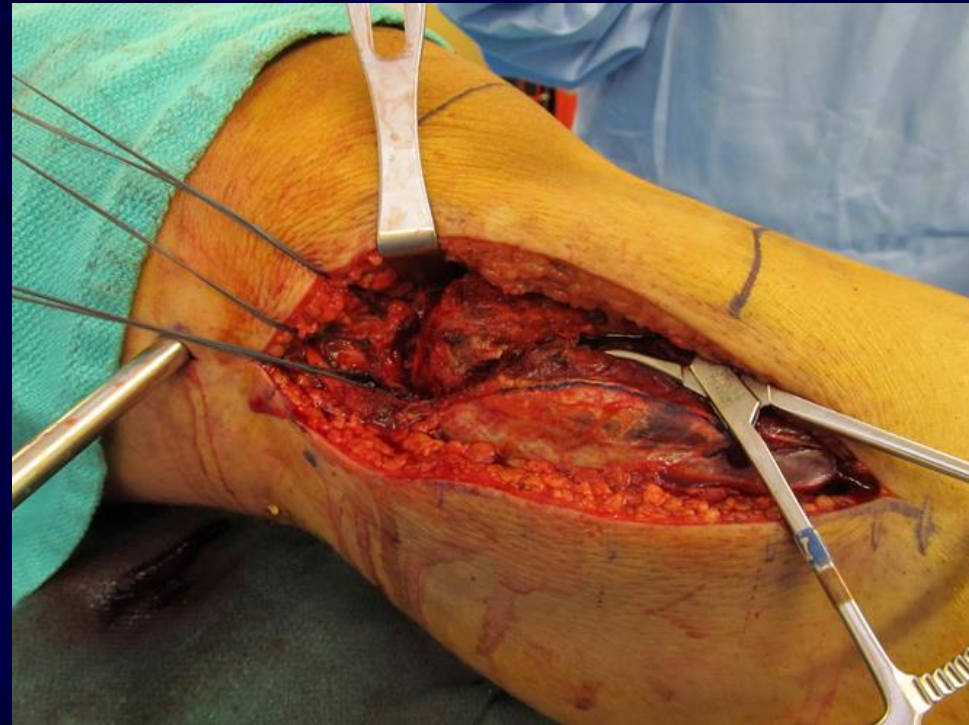
- Most common approach
- Lazy S or Inverted L
- Curvilinear incision centered over Gerdy's tubercle
- Extend distally of the anterior compartment fascia
  - 1 cm off tibial crest
  - Subperiosteal elevate muscle
- Extend proximally midaxial line of knee joint
- Full thickness skin flaps





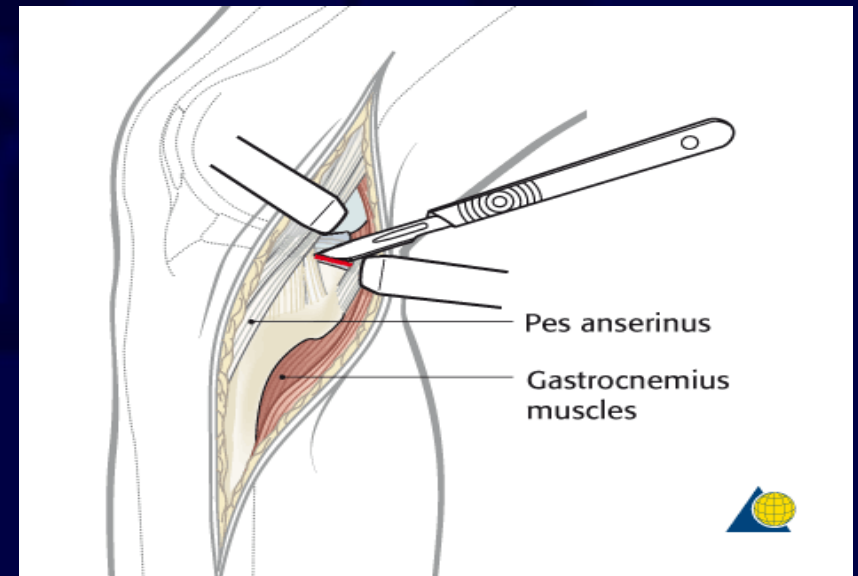
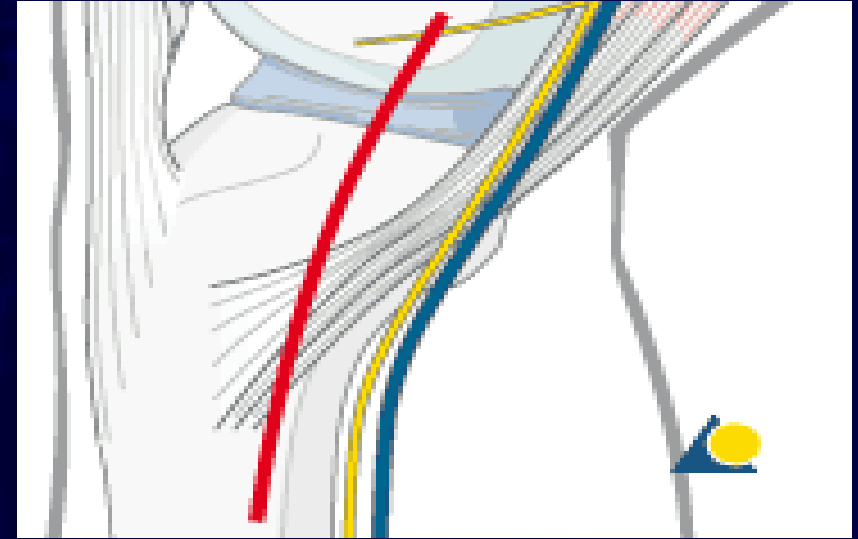
# Surgical Approaches: Anterolateral

- Incise and elevate IT band and anterior compartment fascia
- Subperiosteal dissection off lateral tibial crest and not thru compartment muscle
- Submeniscal arthrotomy
- Inspect the meniscus
  - Tag
  - Repair as needed



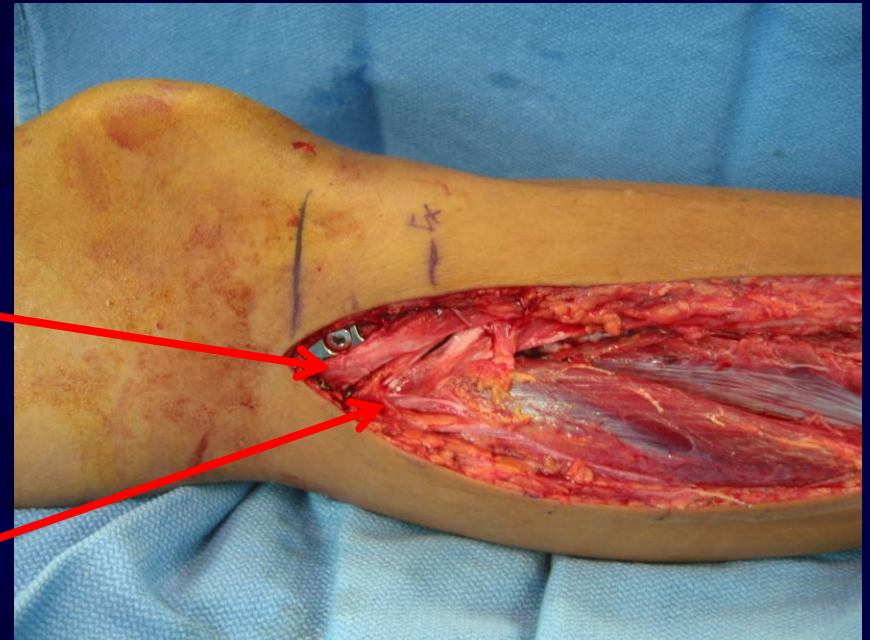
# Surgical Approach: Posteromedial

- Straight incision
- Posterior border of proximal tibia
- Avoid Saphenous nerve and vein
- Interval between Medial head gastrocnemius and hamstrings (Pes anserine tendons)



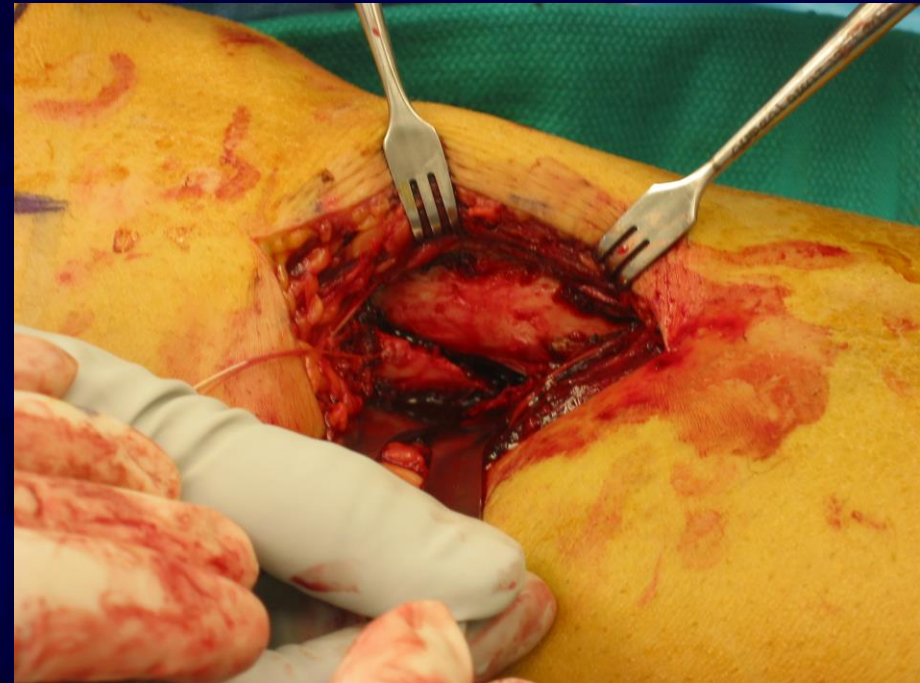
# Surgical Approach: Posteromedial

- Interval between
- Hamstrings (Pes anserine tendons)
- Medial head gastrocnemius



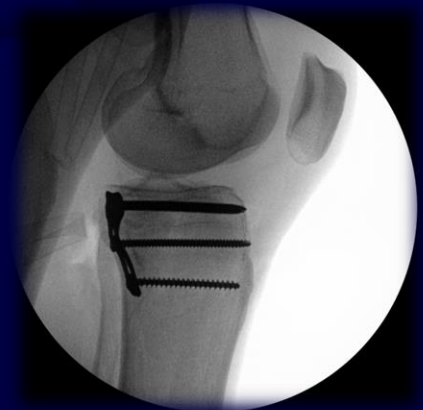
# Surgical Approaches: Posteromedial

- Pes anserine tendons
  - Retracted
  - Tagged and divided for more exposure
- Posterior to superficial MCL
- Medial gastroc muscle elevated off tibia
- Subperiosteal elevate popliteus and soleus muscles



# Surgical Approaches

- Other surgical approaches
- Direct medial or midline parapatellar anterior
  - Isolated medial tibia fractures
- Direct posterior approach
  - Posterior shear fractures
  - Prone
  - Inability to treat anterolateral fracture



# Treatment of Specific Schatzker Fractures Types

# Schatzker Type I Split



Split



# Schatzker Type I Split

- Goals:
  - Restore articular congruity
    - Articular step off
    - Condylar widening
- Open vs.. percutaneous
- Fixation
  - Lag screws
  - Buttress plate





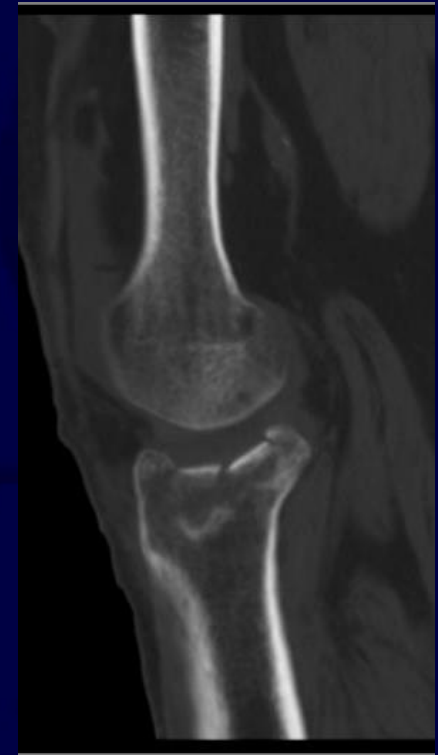
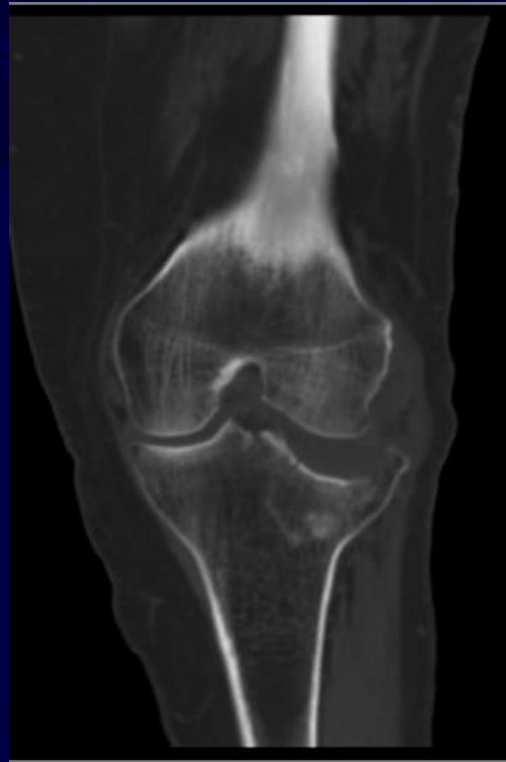
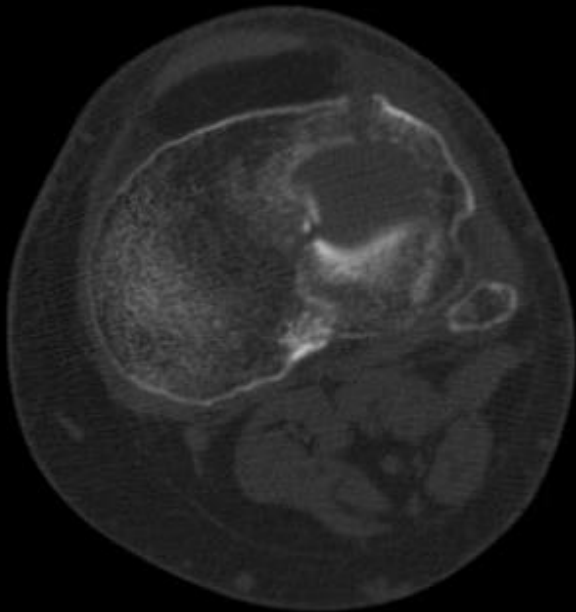
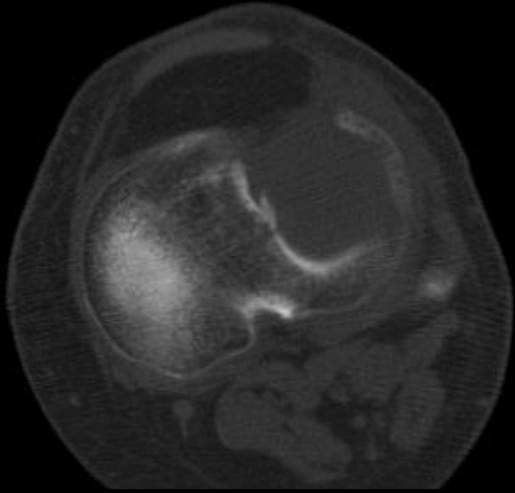
# Schatzker Type II Split-Depression



Split-depression



# Schatzker Type II Split-Depression



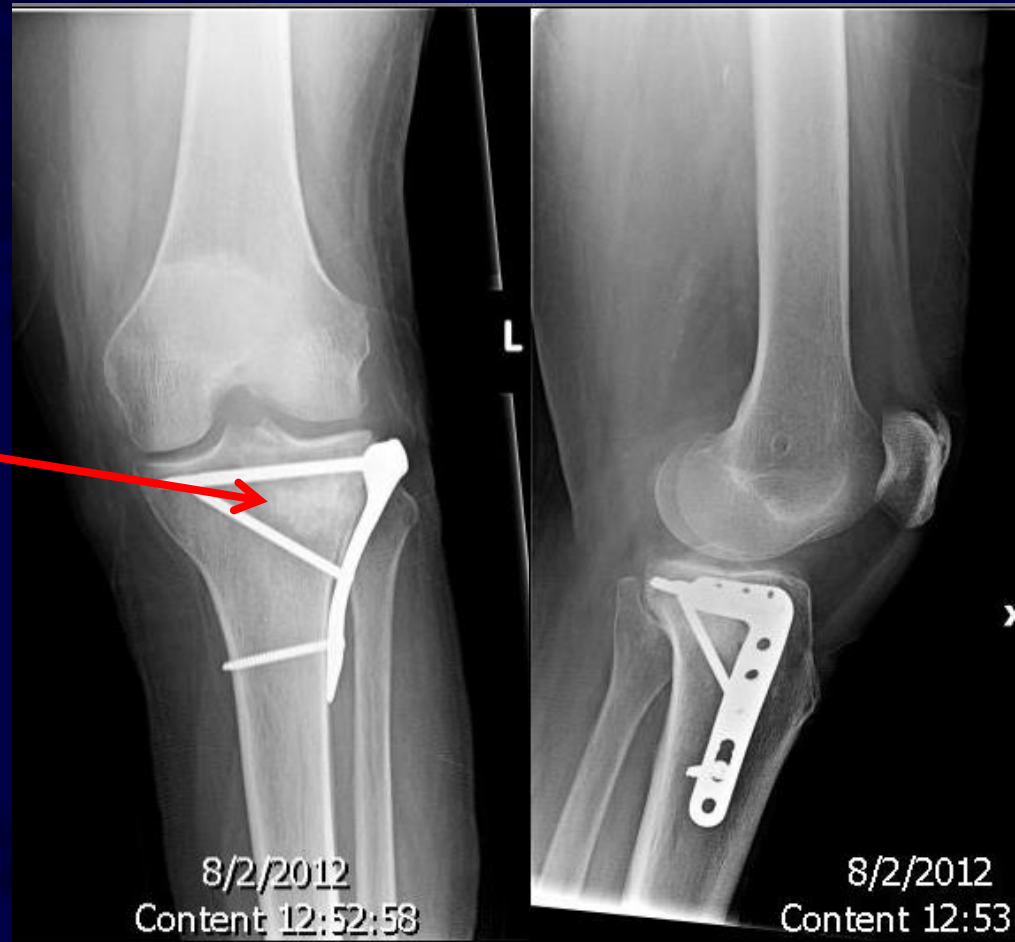
# Schatzker Type II Split-Depression: Surgical Tactics

- Submeniscal arthrotomy
- Full visualization of articular surface
- Repair lateral meniscus
- Femoral distractor
- Elevate articular depression
- Reduce condylar widening
  - Large pelvic reduction clamp
- Temporary K-wires

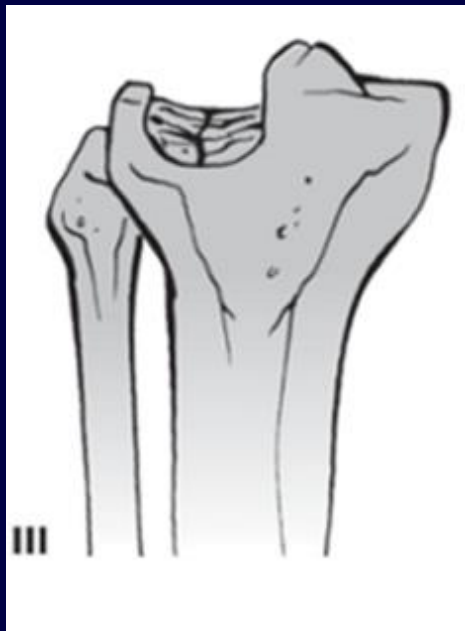


# Schatzker Type II Split-Depression

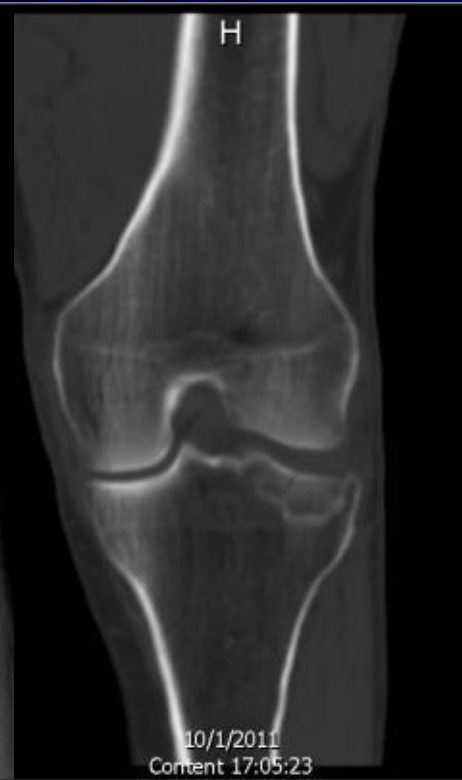
- Fill defect
  - Allograft
  - Autograft
  - Bone substitutes
- Buttress plate
  - Nonlocking: Most
  - Locked: osteoporotic bone
- Subchondral raft screws



# Schatzker Type III Pure Depression

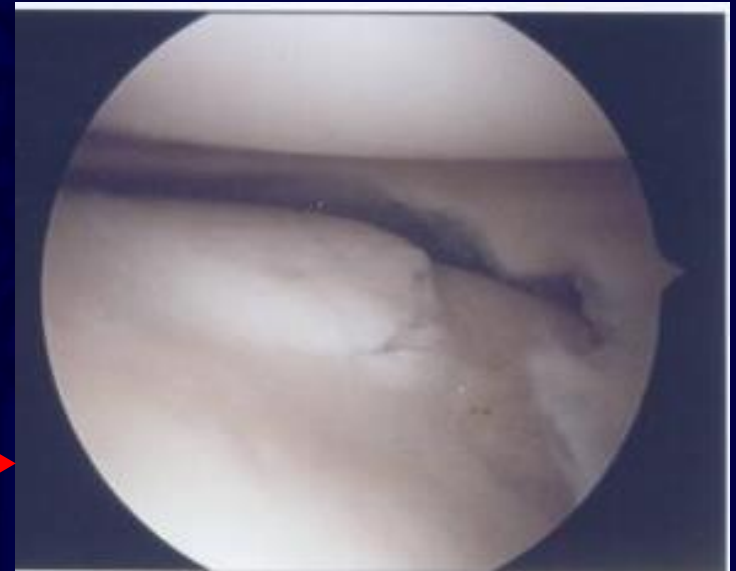


Central depression



# Schatzker Type III Pure Depression

- Surgical technique
  - Open approach
    - Submeniscal
  - Arthroscopic →
- Elevate depressed fragment
- Fill defect
- Stabilization
  - Subchondral raft screws

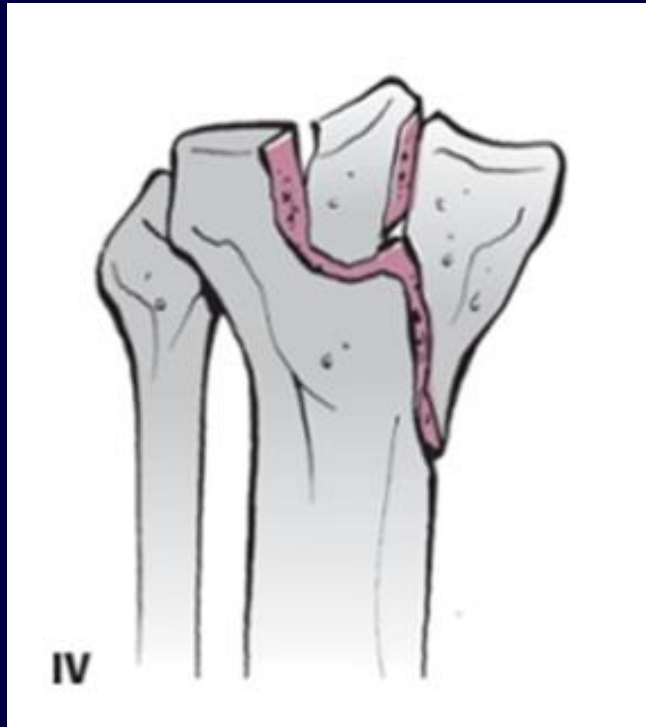


# Schatzker Type III Pure Depression

- Surgical technique
  - Submeniscal
  - Arthroscopic
- Elevate depressed fragment
- Fill defect
- Stabilization
  - Subchondral screws



# Schatzker Type IV Medial plateau



Split fracture,  
Medial plateau

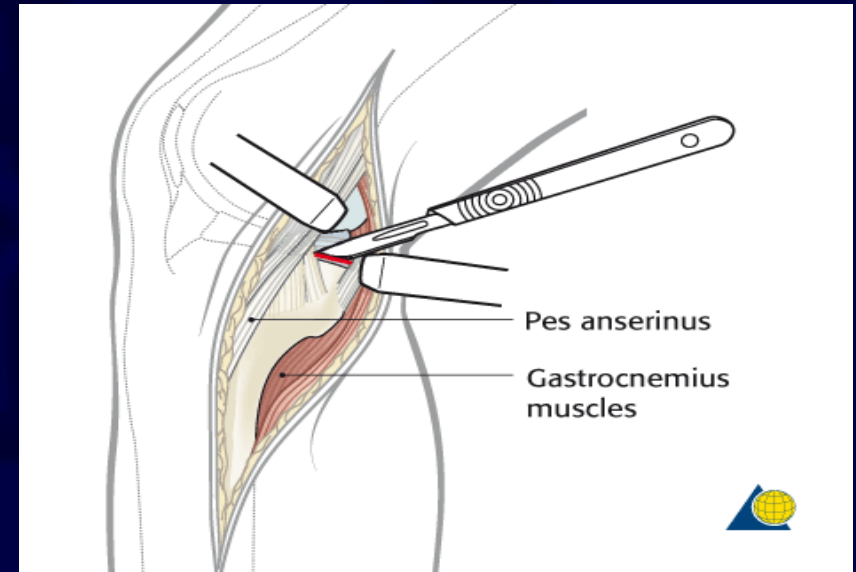


CT post ext. fix



# Schatzker Type IV Medial plateau

- Surgical approach
- Posteromedial
  - Interval between
  - Pes anserine tendons and Medial head gastrocnemius



# Schatzker Type IV Medial plateau

- Don't forget about possible lateral plateau depression
  - Bone tamp to elevate
  - May need anterolateral incision to reduce depression

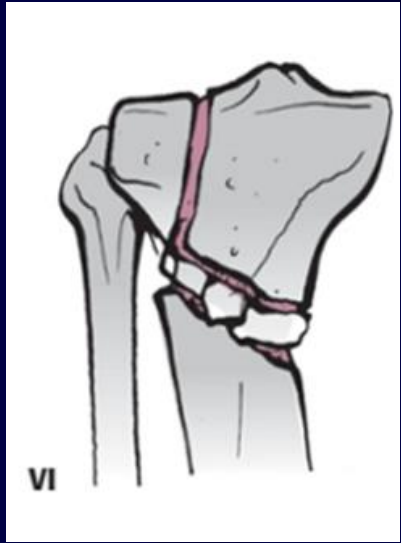


# Schatzker Type IV Medial plateau

- Fixation
  - Straight medial plating
  - Posteromedial plating
  - Combination



# Schatzker Type V, VI Bicondylar



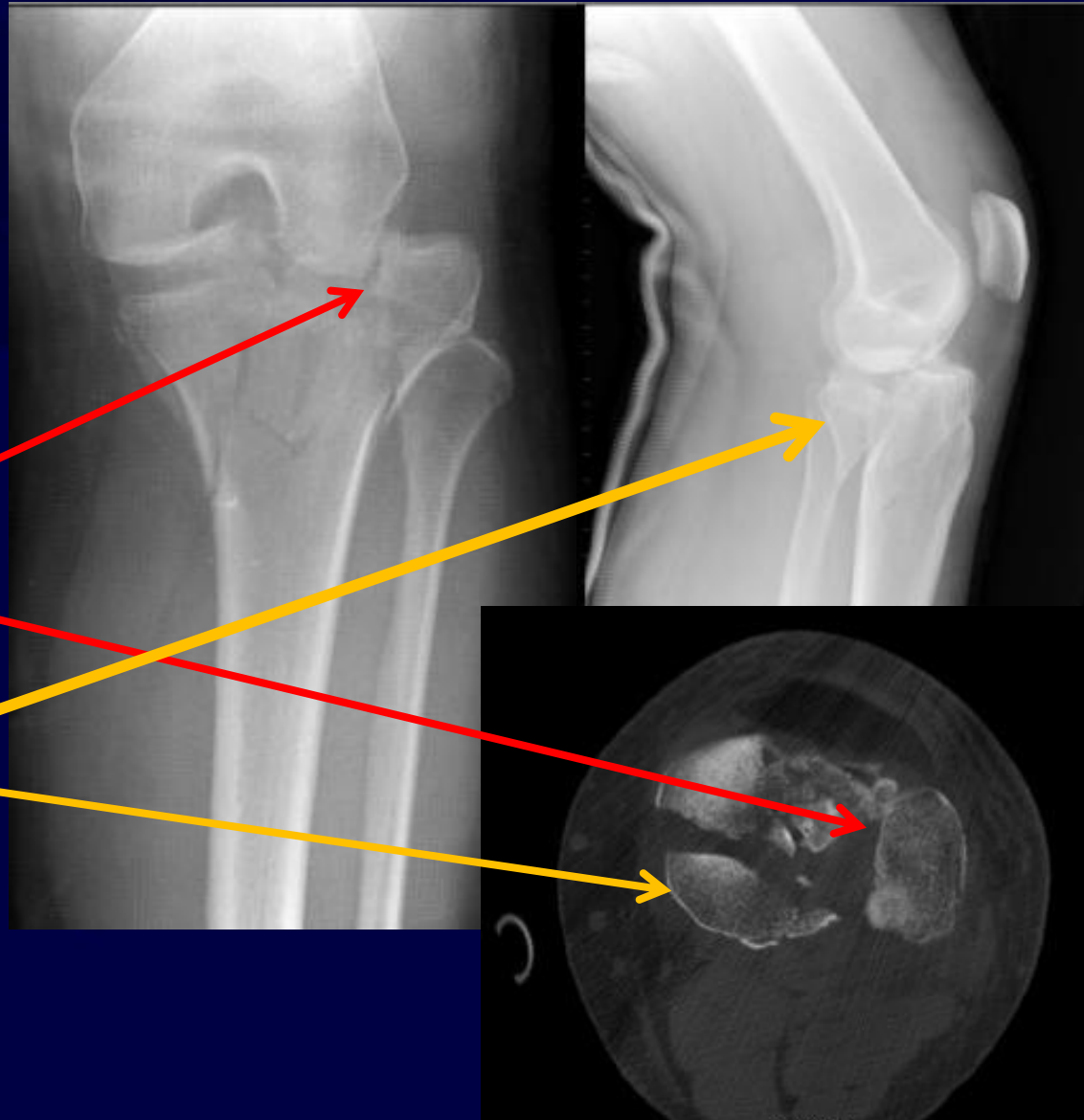
Metadiaphyseal  
dissociation



Bicondylar fracture

# Classic Fracture Pattern

- Bicondylar Fxs
  - 2 classic components:
  - Lateral split depression
  - Posteromedial / coronal split



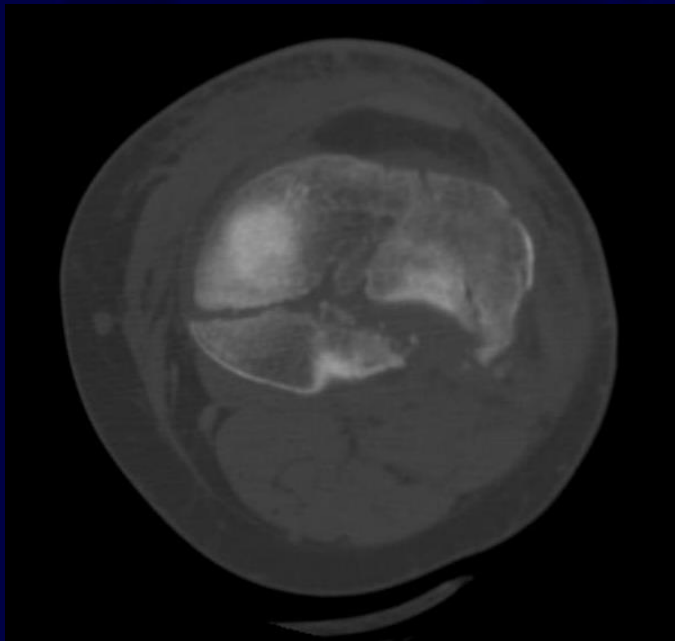
# Schatzker Type V, VI Bicondylar

- Preop plan is important
- Review x-rays and CT scan
- Identify all fractures



# Schatzker Type V, VI Bicondylar

- Preop plan is important
- Review x-rays and CT scan
- Identify all fractures



# Schatzker Type V, VI Bicondylar

- Dual incisions
- Reduce medial plateau
  - K-wires
  - Antiglide plate
- Reduce lateral plateau
  - Tamp up depression
- Restore condylar width
  - Large king tong clamp
- Connect articular block to diaphysis





# Schatzker Type V, VI Bicondylar

- Maintain reduction
- Dual plating



# Schatzker Type V, VI Bicondylar

- Restore mechanical axis
- Cannot accurately assess with fluoro
- Often need intraoperative plain films





# Rehabilitation

- Postoperative Care
- Antibiotic x 24 hours
- +/- drain
- Knee brace
  - For comfort until able to do straight leg raise (SLR)
  - Associated ligamentous injuries
- Elevate leg
- NWB 10-12 weeks



# Rehabilitation

- Physical therapy
- Early ROM
- CPM
- Strengthening
  - Isometric quad sets
  - Heel slides
  - SLR
- Gait training
  - Crutches
  - D/c crutches when able to walk without limp and pain



# Complications

- Infection
  - Surgery timing is important
  - Careful soft tissue handling
  - Prolong operative time
- Nonunion
  - Aseptic
    - Metadiaphyseal junction
  - Septic
  - Opened fracture



Aseptic Nonunion



Revised with ICBG

# Complications

- Contractures
  - Arthrofibrosis
  - Encourage early ROM and physical therapy
  - May require knee manipulation
  - Arthroscopic lysis of adhesion
- Post Traumatic Osteoarthritis



4 yr.. F/U

# Outcomes

- Lansinger et al. JBJS Am 1986
- 102 fractures, 20 yr.. F/U
- 90% excellent or good results
  - Despite some incongruity
- 10% fair or poor
  - > 10mm depression persisted
- Conclusion
  - Instability (lateral or medial with knee extended)
  - Should be operative



# Outcomes

- Honkonen JOT 1995
- 131 fx, 7.6 yr. mean F/U
- 76 operative, 55 nonoperative
- Risk factors for post-traumatic arthritis
  - Increase age
  - Removal of meniscus
  - Articular incongruity
  - Instability
  - Malalignment

# Outcomes

- Stannard et al. JOT 2004
- 34 AO/OTA type 41C
- Mean F/U 21 mo.
- LISS implant
- All healed, mean 15.6 weeks
  - 1/34 malalignment, 0 deep infection, 2 superficial
- 18% implant related pain
  - Careful attention to detail can decrease painful HW

# Outcomes

- Barei et al. JBJS Am 2006
- Retrospective
- Eval dual incisions and dual plating
- 83 AO/OTA Type 41C3
- Mean F/U 59 mo.
- Correlated with outcomes
  - Age, polytrauma, articular reduction
- Residual dysfunction is common

# Outcomes

- Rademakers et al JOT 2007
- 109 fractures, Long-term F/U (5-27 yr.)
- 69% unicondylar, 31% bicondylar
- Mean ROM 135 degrees
- Functional results (Neer, HSS knee scores)
  - Unicondylar had better results vs.. bicondylar
- 31% post-traumatic arthritis, most are tolerable
- Malalignment > 5 degrees correlated with increased DJD
- No differences with patient's age

# Outcomes

- Canadian Orthopaedic Trauma Society JBJS Am 2006
- Level I evidence PRCT
- ORIF vs. Circular fixator
- Displaced Bicondylar (AO/OTA type 41 C1-3)
- 2 yr. F/U, similar results
  - Quality of reduction
  - Residual limb-specific and general health deficits
- Circulator fixator
  - Less EBL, less inpatient hospital stay
- ORIF with higher complication rate

# Outcomes

- Katsenis et al. JOT 2009
- Limited internal fixation and circular fixation
- Retrospective, 3 and 5 yr. F/U
- Knee function and Post-traumatic arthritis
- 129 fx
- Excellent or good
  - 82% at 3 yr.. 78% at 5 yr..
- High incidence of post-traumatic arthritis at 5yr
  - Functional results still satisfactory

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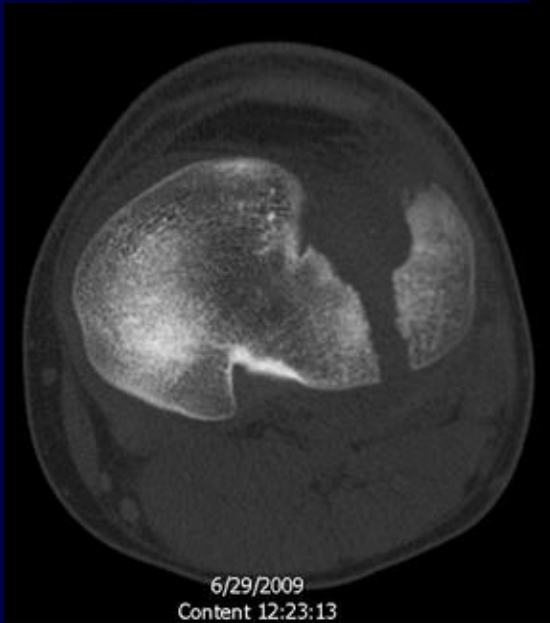
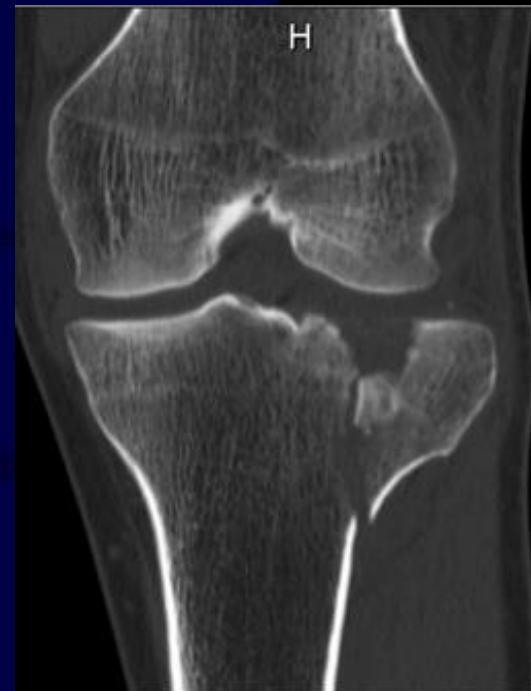
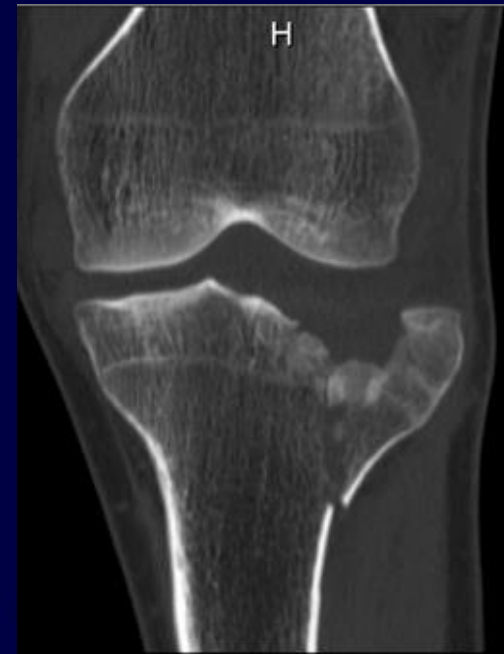
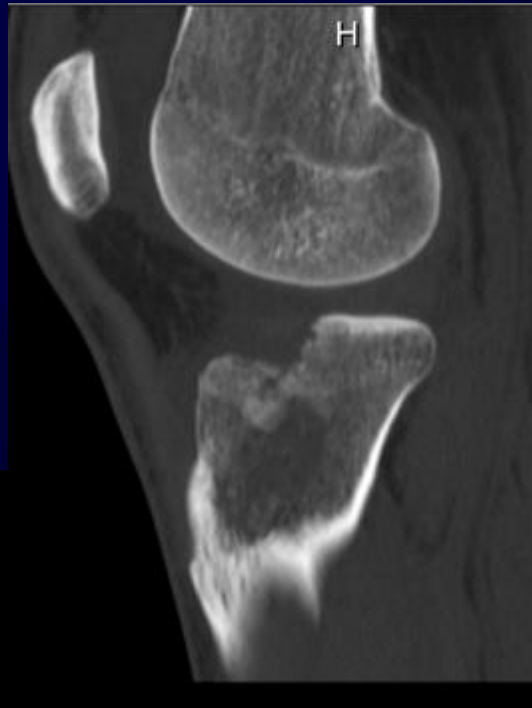
# Selected Cases

- Schatzker II



# Selected Cases

- Schatzker II



# Selected Cases

- Schatzker II
- ORIF
- Buttress plate
- Raft screws



# Selected Cases

Bicondylar with metadiaphyseal fracture



# Selected Cases

Bicondylar with metadiaphyseal fracture

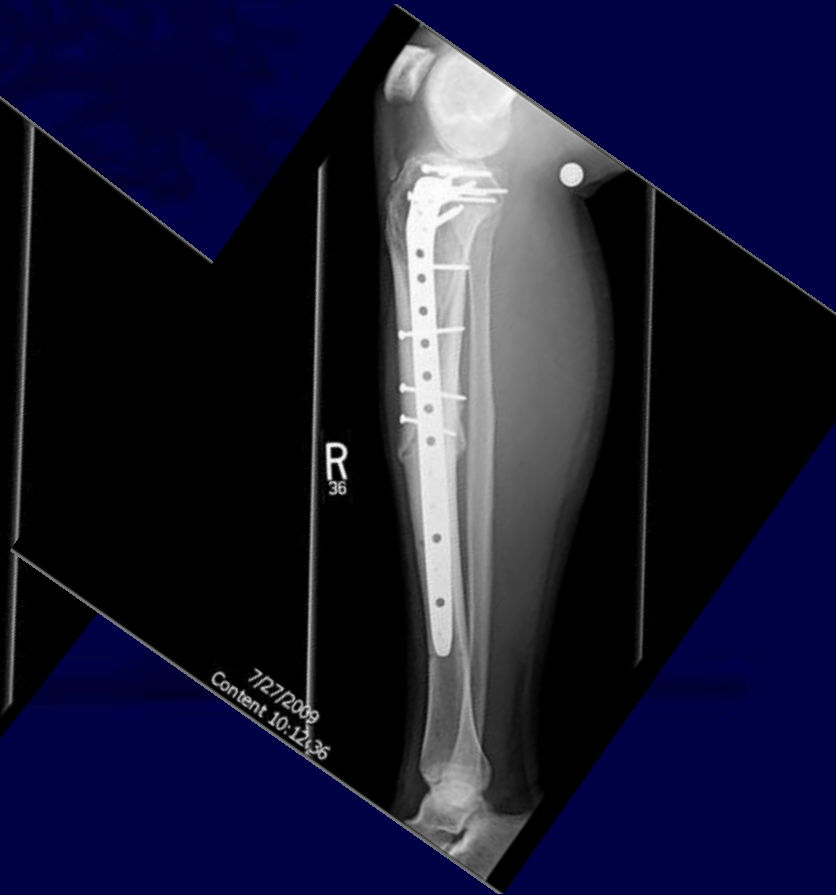
- Ext Fix



# Selected Cases

Bicondylar with metadiaphyseal fracture

- ORIF



# Selected Cases

## Bicondylar with tibial tuberosity fracture

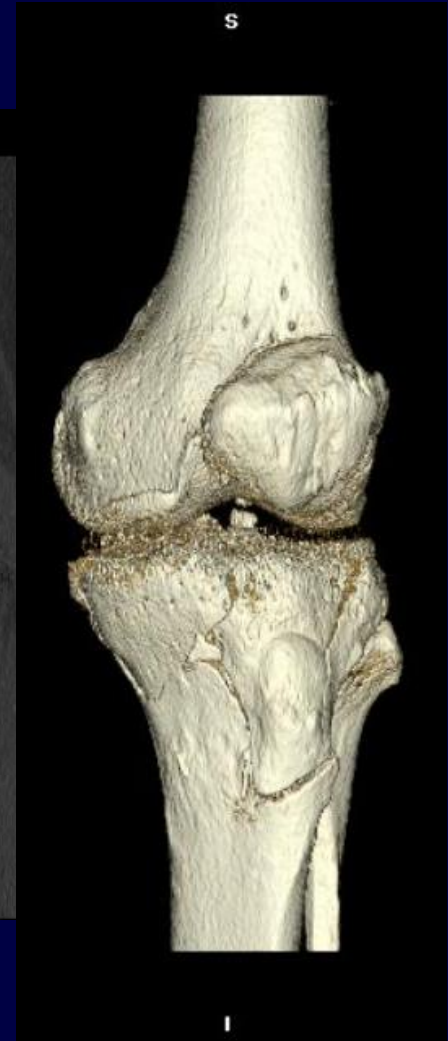
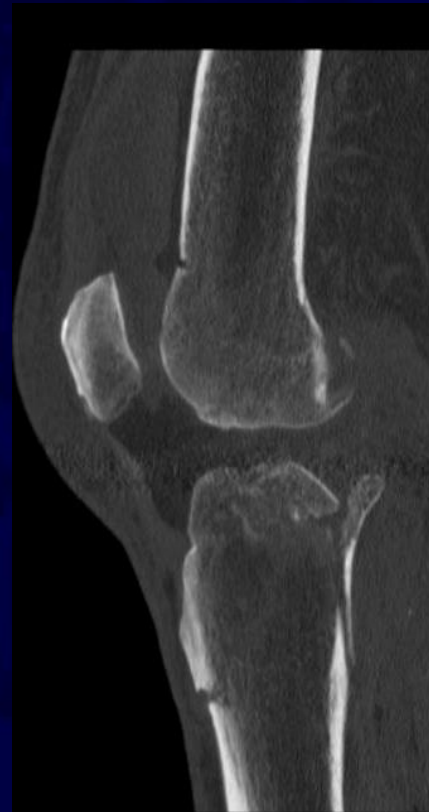
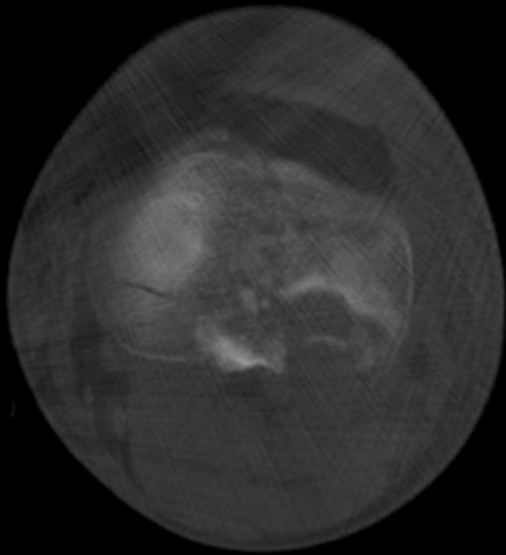
- Must address tuberosity
  - Allow early ROM
- Options for tuberosity fixation
  - Lag screws
  - Plates/screws



# Selected Cases

Bicondylar with tibial tuberosity fracture

CT scan

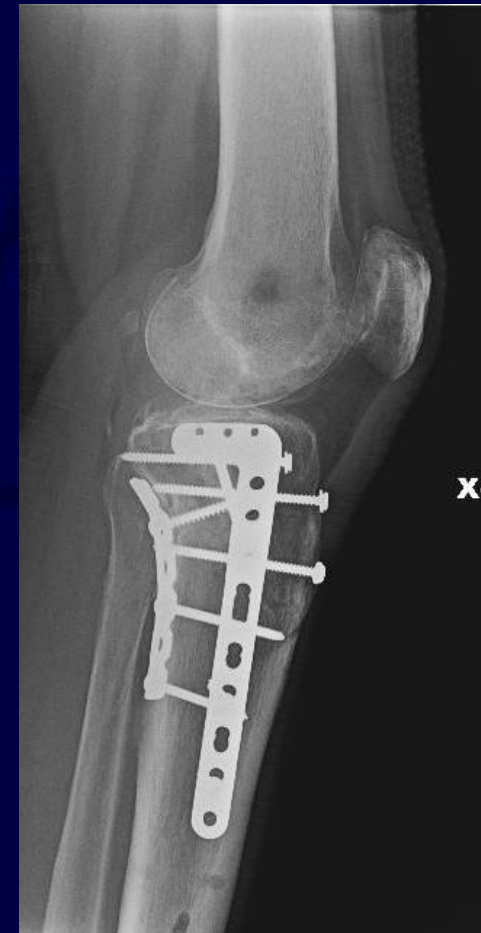




# Selected Cases

## Bicondylar with tibial tuberosity fracture

- ORIF
- Posteromedial approach
  - 3.5mm recon plate
  - Buttress
- Anterolateral approach
  - Precontour plate
- ORIF tuberosity
  - Percutaneous
  - Lag screws



# Selected Cases

Bicondylar with tibial tuberosity fracture

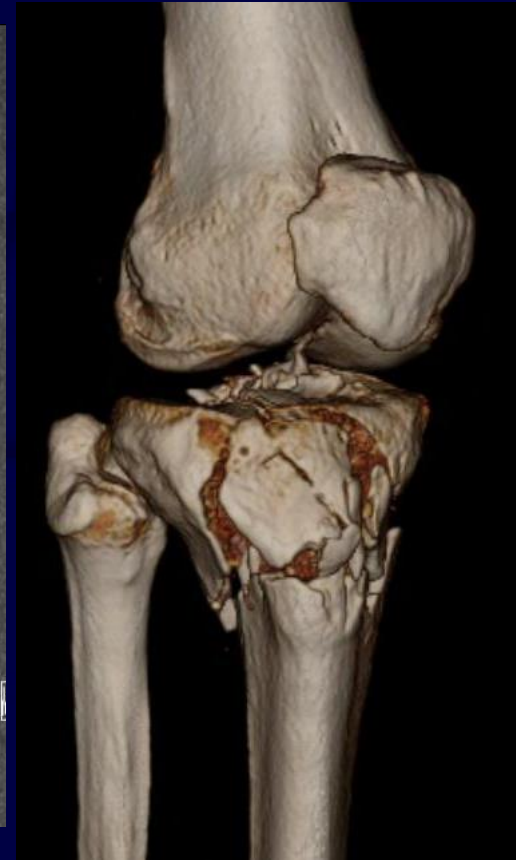
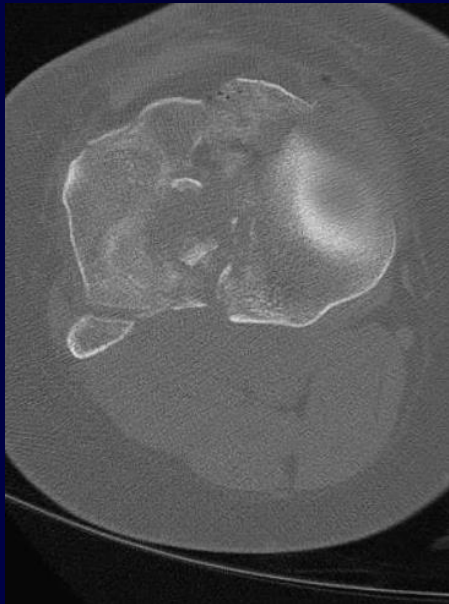


Temporary Ext. Fix

# Selected Cases

Bicondylar with tibial tuberosity fracture

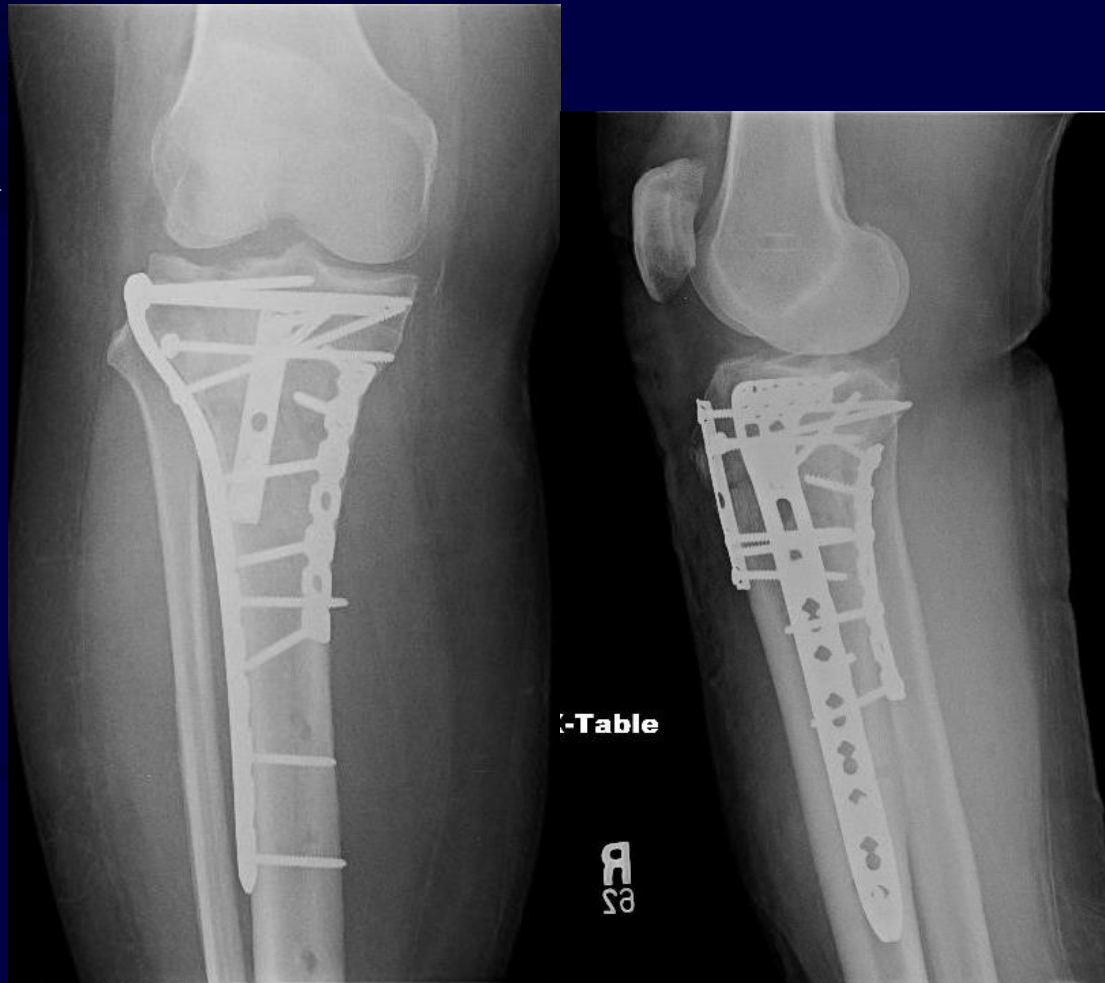
CT scan



# Selected Cases

## Bicondylar with tibial tuberosity fracture

- ORIF
- Posteromedial approach
  - 3.5mm recon plate
  - Buttress
- Anterolateral approach
  - Precontour plate
- ORIF tuberosity
  - 1/3 tubular plate



# Summary:

## Tibial Plateau Fractures

- Understand the fracture pattern
- Respect the soft tissues
- Partial articular (Schatzker 1-3)
  - Buttress: plates and/or interfragmentary screws
- Beware of medial plateau (Schatzker 4)
- Complete articular (Schatzker 5,6)
  - External fixation
  - Preop plan
  - ORIF
    - Obtain and maintain



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