Ultrasounds Do Little for Broken Bones

**By NICHOLAS BAKALAR**OCT. 26, 2016

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Ultrasound is often performed to help speed the healing of broken bones. But a randomized trial reports the procedure is ineffective.

A team led by Canadian researchers recruited 501 patients with fractures of the tibia, the larger of the two lower leg bones. After standard care to repair their fractures, the patients were randomly assigned to low-intensity pulsed ultrasound (similar to the ultrasound used in fetal monitoring), or to a sham treatment. The [study is in BMJ](http://www.bmj.com/content/355/bmj.i5351).

There were no differences between the treatment and placebo groups in the time it took for bones to heal completely, as determined by X-ray. Nor did the procedure reduce the time it took people to return to work without limitations, bear full weight on the broken leg or resume pre-injury levels of leisure or household activities. There were also no differences in infections or unplanned secondary operations.

“There does not appear to be any evidence for ultrasound in the management of tibia fracture,” said the lead author, Jason W. Busse, an associate professor of anesthesiology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

Ultrasound has been approved for the treatment of bone fracture since 1994, but “the medical device industry has not been held to a high standard,” Dr. Busse said. “We hope that our study encourages investigators to explore the evidence underlying other devices, even if they’ve been on the market for 20 years or more.”