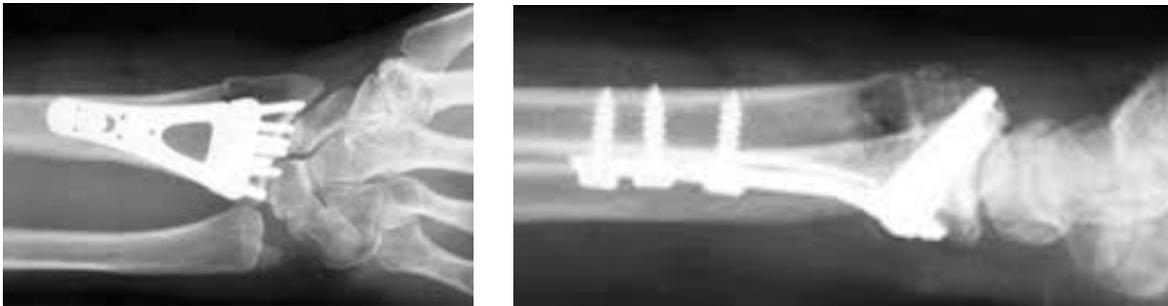


Fractured wrist requiring surgery

Introduction

A fractured (broken) wrist usually occurs as a result of a fall onto an outstretched hand. Either one or both of the forearm bones can break (radius and ulna). Soft tissues of the wrist that are attached to the bones can also be damaged.



Symptoms

- **Pain** – when the bones of the wrist are broken it causes pain. This usually requires taking pain killers as recommended by your doctor, and the pain will settle over time. It may take up to four to six months for the wrist to feel reasonably 'normal' after the break, but improvements may be possible for up to 18 months or longer.
- **Tenderness** – it is usual for the whole wrist joint to feel tender when you touch the joint/skin after the injury, whilst the bones are healing and even after treatment (plaster cast or surgery). This can take two to three months to settle.
- **Swelling** – the wrist joint will swell after injury due to tissue damage. During the first two weeks after injury it is very important to raise your hand and wrist in the sling given to you, to reduce swelling. Avoid letting your swollen hand 'hang down' as this will make the swelling worse. Try to keep your fingers gently moving during this time also, which you can even do whilst you have any temporary plaster cast or splint on.
- **Deformity** – occasionally the wrist joint can look a slightly different shape when it has healed due to bones 'resetting' in a slightly different alignment. With surgery this is rarely a big problem.
- **Stiffness** – the fingers and wrist joint can easily become stiff after this injury due to tissue damage and swelling. For this reason it is very important to do the finger exercises shown at the end of this information sheet even if given a temporary cast or splint.

Surgical treatment

Occasionally a wrist fracture (break) will need an operation because the bones have moved into an 'unacceptable' position where they are not properly aligned. Your doctor will advise you if this is the case when they look at your wrist and your x-ray. Your doctor will advise you on the type of surgery needed for your wrist, as there are two principal surgical techniques that each have their own unique risks and benefits.

One method is to manipulate the wrist into a good position and then hold the wrist with 2 or 3 wires (k-wires). These wires are left proud of the skin slightly and you still require a plaster for up to six weeks. The wires can then be removed easily in the clinic after four to six weeks, after which your wrist will be understandably stiff and require rehabilitation sometimes with formal physiotherapy.

A second method is to fix the wrist with a plate on the bone, and you then do not need a plaster cast for a long time, allowing you to start moving the wrist more quickly. These operations can be done with you asleep under general anaesthesia, or with you awake but your arm asleep (this is called regional anaesthesia). If you are worried about being awake with regional anaesthesia, you can speak with your anaesthetist before the operation, and you may be offered a sedative to help you relax. Generally a regional anaesthesia is considered a more safe option.

Complications

A small number of patients may experience the following:

- Delayed bone healing
- Stiffness
- Altered sensation
- Swelling
- Pain
- Infection

Some complications can be unique to the choice of surgical technique used to treat your broken wrist. Your doctor will speak to you about this in the fracture clinic before surgery.

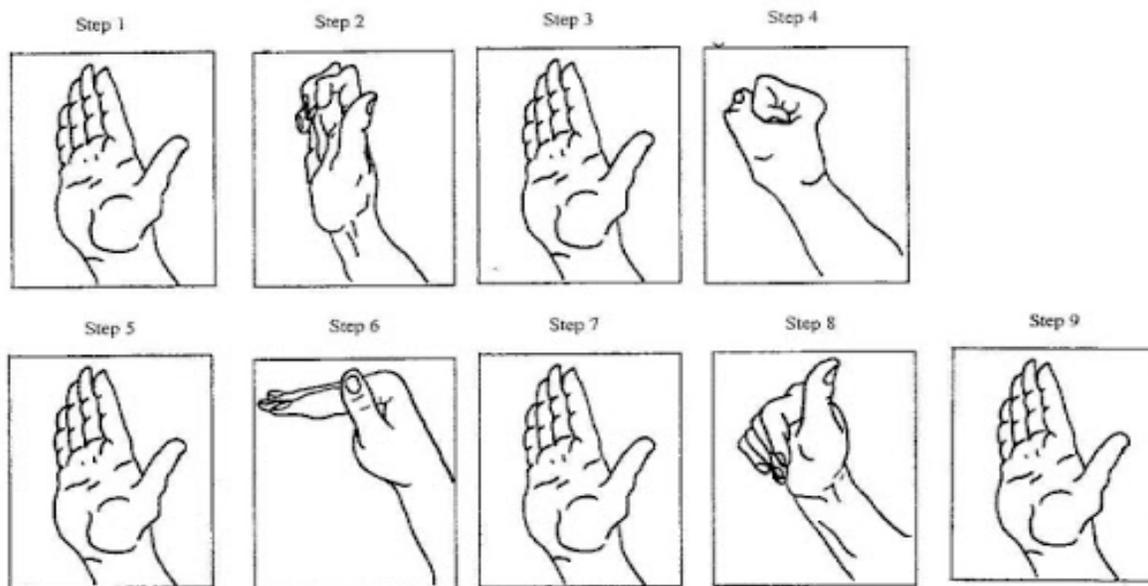
How long will I be off work and when can I drive?

This depends on your job. In general terms, your wrist will take six to eight weeks to heal fully and during this time you will be unable to lift heavy items or do heavy manual work. However if you can do office-based duties you can potentially return to work before this time. Please speak to your insurance company with regard to driving for their regulations, but the most important consideration when driving is safety. You must not drive under any circumstances until you have no distracting pain, you are confident that you are in control of the vehicle at all times, and be able to perform an emergency stop competently.

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Hand Therapy

Your wrist will be stiff after your injury, particularly if it has been in plaster. During the time of wearing the plaster and afterwards, it is very important that you work on the exercises given to help to get over this stiffness. It is helpful to perform each of the exercises shown 10 times, and repeat them four to five times per day. Do the exercises as far as pain allows and not beyond. Your range of movement will improve gradually with time after your treatment.



After the cast is removed it is not necessary to routinely refer you for physiotherapy if you follow the exercises below.

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET



Push both palms together and lift your elbows up as far as comfort allows, until your forearms are parallel to the floor. At first it will be hard to get your palms together completely, but this will improve and you will then be able to bring your elbows up higher.



Put the backs of your hand together and lift the elbows as far as comfort allows.



With the elbows tucked into your side, turn your palms up towards the ceiling as far as discomfort allows. It is normal to feel a pulling or tightness sensation.



Keeping arms into the side as above turn your palms towards the floor.



PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Further information

The day surgery unit can be contacted on 02476 966861 / 02476 966868 (University Hospital), or on 01788 663264 (Hospital of St. Cross). For further information please visit our hand service's web site at www.tinyurl.com/uhcwhand, or contact:

- Hand Therapy at University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire on 02476 966016
- Hand Therapy at Hospital of St. Cross, Rugby on 01788 663257
- Our specialist hand surgery nurse / hand-coordinator on 02476 965072

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 02476 966861 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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Document History

Author	Lynne Nicholls, Michael David
Department	Hand Therapy
Contact Tel No	26861
Published	April 2020
Reviewed	
Review	April 2022
Version	1
Reference No	