

Hand therapy

Fractured wrist – recovery and exercises after surgery

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet provides advice and exercises to do after your wrist fracture surgery. If you have any questions about the information below, please speak to the hand therapy team on 020 3311 0333.

What surgery will I need to repair my fractured wrist?

Many wrist fractures can be treated successfully without surgery. But some cases need an operation. This is to:

- restore the normal structure of the bones
- provide stability and prevent further bone fragment movement

One of the ways this is often done is called 'open reduction internal fixation' (ORIF) surgery. The broken bones are put in the correct position and then held in place with a metal plate and screws. This allows the break to heal. This fixation is designed to be strong enough to allow you to move your wrist within the first few weeks of surgery.



Fracture healing

It will take about six weeks for your bone to heal. Then it will take another six weeks for the bone to be almost as strong as it was before.

But some injuries are more complex, with damage to the surrounding ligaments as well as the bone. Ligaments are tough bands of tissue that keep bones in place. These injuries take longer to heal. You can expect it to take between six and 12 months to be able to use your hand as normal.

Pain and swelling

Pain and swelling are normal symptoms after surgery. To manage this we recommend you keep your hand raised above heart level. You can use a sling during the day. But it is important to remove this regularly and move your elbow and shoulder to stop them from becoming stiff.

At night, use pillows to support and raise your hand.

Over-the-counter painkillers and anti-inflammatories like paracetamol or ibuprofen can help you to manage pain and swelling. Check with a pharmacist if you are unsure whether or not you can take these medicines.

Wound care

To reduce the risk of infection:

- keep your wound dry and clean
- finish any course of antibiotics you have been prescribed
- cut down or stop smoking. Find support at [www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/keep your wound dry and clean](http://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/keep-your-wound-dry-and-clean)

If you notice any of the following and are concerned about an infection, please go to A&E or contact NHS 111 for advice. You may need antibiotics.

- swelling, and increasing redness and pain in the affected area
- pus forming in or around the wound (infection)
- feeling generally unwell with a high temperature (fever)
- swollen glands under the chin or in the neck, armpits or groin

After your surgery:

- keep your hand raised above your elbow as much as possible
- keep your cast dry. Cover it with a plastic bag in the bath or shower. Or use a waterproof cast cover, which you can buy online or at a pharmacy
- only use your affected hand for light, pain-free activities
- do not use a strong grip, do not lift heavy items and do not lean on your affected hand
- do not drive

Please seek medical attention if:

- you have increased pain, swelling, pins and needles or numbness in your affected arm that does not get better with basic pain medication and raising your arm

Get help within 24 hours. Get an urgent GP appointment, call NHS 111 or attend your nearest emergency department or walk in centre.

If your plaster breaks, is too tight or becomes loose, contact the plaster room at St Mary's Hospital on 020 3312 1871. We can arrange a time for you to come in and get your cast checked. We are open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. We'll do our best to arrange to see you either that day or the next.

What follow-up appointments do I need?

After your operation you should receive a **fracture clinic appointment** for about two to three weeks after your surgery.

You will also get a **hand therapy appointment**. The date for this will depend on the stability of your fracture.

Sometimes you may be asked to attend the hand therapy department to remove the cast and start wrist exercises before you return to the fracture clinic.

Exercises

Start to exercise your fingers, thumb, elbow and shoulder immediately after surgery. It is important to keep these joints moving to stop them from stiffening.

To start with, it might feel uncomfortable to do these exercises. But with regular practice they will become easier, and your movement will improve.

Do these exercises five times a day. Repeat each exercise five times.

You can do more if you are able to.



Straighten out fingers as far as possible



Try to make a full fist. Aim to make a full fist 2 weeks after your injury.



Bend your large knuckles as far as possible, keeping the rest of your fingers straight.



Start with your fingers straight, then bend the tips of your fingers, keeping the large joints straight, forming a 'hook'.



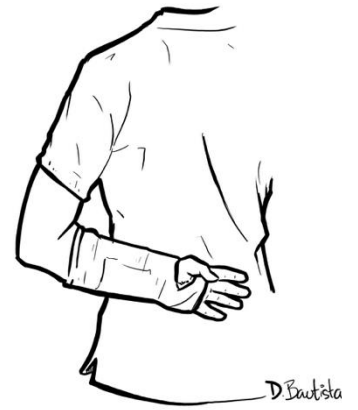
Bend both thumb joints as far as possible.



Straighten your thumb as far as possible.



Touch your thumb to the tip of each finger.



Reach your hand behind your back as far as possible.



Straighten your elbow as far as possible.



Bend your elbow as far as possible.



Reach your hand above your head as far as possible.



Place your hand behind your head as far as possible.

Pain and swelling

Pain and swelling in your wrist and hand is normal at this stage. Raising your hand above heart level and performing the exercises in this leaflet will help. Your hand therapist may also provide you with a compression glove and discuss other techniques for managing this.

Basic painkillers such as paracetamol may help reduce pain. If this does not work for you, we recommend contacting your GP for advice.

Splint

We usually give you a removable splint when your dressings are removed. You should wear this all the time, except when you are doing your exercises or washing. Your hand therapist will also tell you when it will be possible to start removing your splint for light activities.

Scar management

Your hand therapist will teach you how to massage your scar to improve the flexibility, colour and feeling of your scar.

You should massage your scar:

- three to four times a day
- for five to 10 minutes

Use a water-based cream, such as Nivea, E45 or aqueous cream.

Exercises after your cast is removed

It is important to start exercises for your wrist as soon as the cast is removed.

By exercising and using your hand for normal activities the feeling of stiffness and discomfort will gradually disappear.

We recommend you:

- do the following exercises five times a day
- repeat each exercise five times

You can do more if you are able to.



Rest your forearm firmly on a table edge and bend your wrist back up and down.



Rest your elbow on a table. Then 'wave' or tilt your hand one way and then the other.

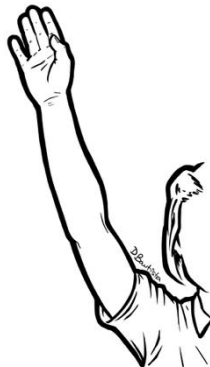


Keep your elbow tucked into your ribs and turn your palm to face up and down.

If you are still having problems with moving your fingers, thumb, elbow or shoulder then we recommend you also complete the following exercises:



Straighten and then bend your elbow as far as possible.



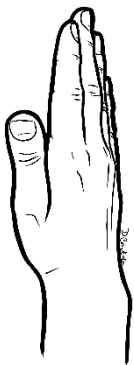
Reach your hand above your head.



Place your hand behind your head.



Place your hand behind your back.



Straighten your fingers as much as possible. You should be able to fully straighten your fingers by this time.



Bend your fingers into a fist. You should be able to make a full fist.



Start with your fingers straight, then bend the tips of your fingers, keeping the large joints straight, forming a 'hook'.



Bend your large knuckles as far as possible, keeping the rest of your fingers straight.



Touch the tip of each finger with your thumb.



Bend your thumb across your palm and then straighten your thumb.

Useful contact details

To reschedule an appointment:

Telephone: 020 3311 0333

if your appointment is on the same day

choose **option 1**

if your appointment is another date

choose **option 2**

Email: appointments@imperial.nhs.uk

To contact a therapist:

Email imperial.handtherapyimperial@nhs.net

How do I give feedback about my visit?

We want to hear your **suggestions** or **comments**. Your feedback helps us provide the best service. You can always speak to a member of staff.

You can also contact the **patient advice and liaison service (PALS)** on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 to 16.00, Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays) or email at imperial.pals@nhs.net. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or questions and they can help solve problems.

You can make a complaint by ringing **020 3312 1337 / 1349** or emailing ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net. The address is Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY.

Other ways to read this leaflet

Please email us at imperial.communications@nhs.net if you need this leaflet in a different format. This could be large print, Easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in a different language.

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