

Department of hand therapy

# Fractured wrist – after surgery

## Information for patients

### 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 are successfully treated without surgery. However, some cases require an operation to restore the normal structure of the bones and to provide stability and prevent further bone fragment movement. One of the common procedures to achieve this is 'open reduction internal fixation' (ORIF) surgery where the position of the broken bones is corrected and then held in place with a metal plate and screws, to allow the fracture 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 and another six weeks for the bone to be almost as strong as it was before. However, some injuries are more complex with damage to the surrounding ligaments, which take longer to heal. For some people, it can take between six and twelve months for you to be able to use your hand as normal.

### Pain and swelling

Pain and swelling are normal symptoms after surgery. To help manage this we recommend keeping your hand raised above heart level. You may 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.

### Wound care

To stop the risk of infection keep your wound dry and clean and if you have been prescribed antibiotics make sure you complete the provided course. You should also cut down or stop smoking.



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If you notice any of the following and are concerned about an infection please go straight to A&E as you may need antibiotics:

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

## 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. Initially, it might feel uncomfortable to do these exercises but with regular practice they will become easier and your movement will improve. We recommend you complete the following exercises five times a day and repeat each exercise five times, but you can do more if you are able to.



Straighten your fingers as much as possible.



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



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



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



Bend both thumb joints as far as possible.



Straighten your thumb as far as possible.



Touch your thumb to the tip of each finger.



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.



Reach your hand behind your back as far as possible.

### Additional information following 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 lift heavy items or lean on your affected hand
- do not drive

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## Please seek medical attention if:

- you experience increased pain, swelling, pins and needles or numbness in your affected arm that is not relieved by basic pain medication and raising your arm
- your plaster breaks, is too tight or becomes loose

## What follow-up appointments do I need?

After your operation you should receive a fracture clinic appointment for approximately two to three weeks after your surgery. You will also receive a hand therapy appointment; the timing of this will depend on the stability of your fracture. In some cases, we may ask you to attend the hand therapy department to remove the cast and start wrist exercises before you return to the fracture clinic.

## Who do I contact for more information?

**Fracture clinic appointments:** 020 3312 3736 / 6778

**Hand therapy:** 020 3311 0333

**Email:** Therapies.Outpatients@imperial.nhs.uk

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net**. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf. Alternatively, you may wish to express your concerns in **writing** to:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY.

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille, or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:

**imperial.patient.information@nhs.net**

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