

Virtual Fracture Clinic

Suspected scaphoid fractures

Information for patients

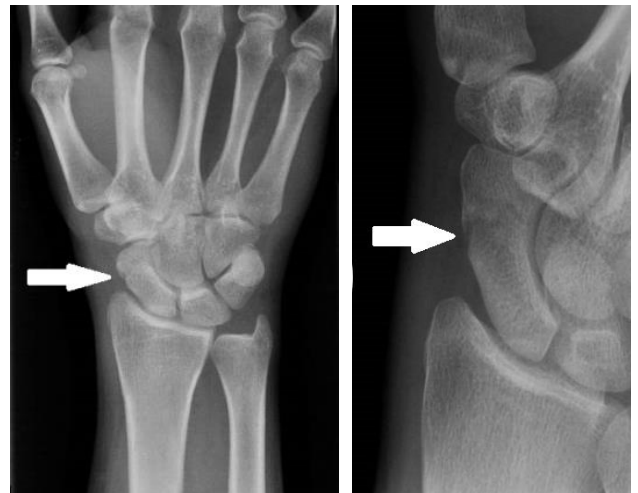
Introduction

This leaflet aims to explain what happens when we suspect you have a fracture in one of your wrist bones, called your scaphoid bone. A bone fracture means the same as a bone break.

Where is my scaphoid bone?

Your scaphoid bone is one of the eight small bones in your wrist, called the carpal bones. The scaphoid is on the thumb side of your wrist. It's just above the thick bone in your arm called the radius.

These X-ray images show a break to the scaphoid bone in someone's right wrist.



What causes a scaphoid fracture?

Scaphoid fractures are usually caused by an unexpected force through the wrist and hand. For example, you might fall onto the ground on an outstretched hand. Traumas such as motor vehicle crashes can also cause scaphoid fractures.

What are the signs and symptoms of a scaphoid fracture?

We suspect a scaphoid fracture if we find your wrist has been forced to move further than normal. You might also feel pain when we press around the base of your thumb.

A scaphoid fracture can be difficult to diagnose. You may need more investigation, like X-rays, CT or MRI scans.

What's the treatment for a scaphoid fracture?

Many scaphoid fractures are successfully treated by stopping the wrist from moving. We call this immobilisation. The wrist is held still in a cast or a removable brace for six to ten weeks.

If your break is near the base of your scaphoid bone, you may need longer in the cast. Or you may need surgery. This is because this part of the bone has a poor blood supply.

Is exercise important?

It's very important that you move your fingers while in the cast to get movement back and avoid stiffness. This is regardless of if your scaphoid break is treated with a cast or surgery.

A good target is to be able to make a full fist within one to two weeks of your injury.

See page 3 for exercises to help you do this.

Who can help me with exercises?

We may refer you to the hand therapy team after removing your cast or after your operation.

How long will it take to heal?

The main issue with scaphoid fracture is the risk of delayed healing. This may require longer to heal and longer immobilisation. Generally, getting movement back is not a problem but it may take three to six months to regain full grip strength.

You can expect some pain when pushing on your wrist for up to a year.

When can I return to my day-to-day activities?

You can resume **moderate activities** after around eight weeks if there are no concerns with your bone healing.

- you must avoid contact sports for three months
- you must avoid leisure involving impact on the hand for three months

Driving

You can decide when to drive again. But you should feel confident you can control your vehicle safely in the case of an emergency.

Return to work

Your return to work will depend on your job and your workplace's flexibility. Contact your therapist, GP, or consultant if you need a Statement of Fitness to Work, often called a fit note or sometimes a 'sick note'.

See guidance about fit notes at www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-fit-note-a-guide-for-patients-and-employees/the-fit-note-guidance-for-patients-and-employees

Will I regain full function, and when?

Broken bones can have more of an impact on our day-to-day lives than most people expect. We often underestimate the time it takes for the signs and symptoms to go away completely.

Pain should improve on a weekly basis. It tends to be present during hand use for around 12 weeks. Some people feel pain occasionally for up to a year. But this is rare and tends to be associated with heavier activities or colder temperature.

At three months after the injury, most patients will have regained **near full range of motion** and **strength** and will not notice significant issues in their day-to-day life.

Swelling can take up to six to 12 months to settle completely.

How can I help my recovery?

There are several ways you can help your recovery:

1. Take basic painkillers and anti-inflammatories like paracetamol or ibuprofen to help manage pain and swelling. Please speak to your pharmacist if you are unsure as to which medications you can use safely.
2. Aim to keep your hand elevated above the level of your heart for the first one to two weeks. This is important because it will reduce swelling. But you should avoid wearing a sling. This can cause discomfort and tightness in your shoulder and neck.
3. Apply ice to the swollen area for 15 minutes, three to four times per day. For example, use ice cubes or a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a tea cloth. Stop if it starts to feel uncomfortable or numb.
4. Use your hand as normally as possible within your cast or brace. But stick to light activities, lifting, pulling, or pushing for the first four weeks after your injury. Avoid moderate to heavy lifting.

‘PRICE’ is also a good way to remember how to take care of your injury.

P	R	I	C	E
Protect	Rest	Ice	Compress	Elevate
Protect your injury from further damage, for example, by using a support or a splint.	Rest your injury for the first two or three days. Then gradually reintroduce movement gradually so you do not delay your recovery by losing muscle strength.	Ice the painful area with a cold compress like ice or a bag of frozen peas. Wrap it in a towel. This will help reduce swelling and bruising. Do this for 15 to 20 minutes every two to three hours. Do not put ice on your skin as it can damage it.	Compress the injured area with an elastic bandage or tubular bandage to help limit swelling and movement. But do not leave the bandage on while you sleep.	Elevate your injury by resting it above the level of your heart and keep it supported.

What exercises should I do?

To avoid stiffness and improve movement, do these exercises five to 10 times, five times a day:



You can expect these exercises to feel uncomfortable when your fingers are stiff. This is normal. If they cause more pain, stop and contact the virtual fracture clinic. You can stop doing them when they become too easy.

Who can I contact for more information?

We're here to help if you've got concerns about your injury, symptoms or exercises.

Call us on 077 7455 5354 (Monday to Friday between 09.00am and 5.00pm).

Or you can **email** imperial.vfc@nhs.net or 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 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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Activity level guide

Examples of 'light activity'

combing your hair	playing cards	shaving	using a remote control
dusting	putting on light clothes	tying shoelaces	using the telephone
fastening a zip and buttons	putting on socks, if they are not tight	typing	writing
handling money	reading a newspaper or book	using a knife or spoon, but not cutting meat	
personal care like washing, putting on make up		using a light switch	

Examples of 'medium activity' (weeks 6 +)

hanging out washing	opening and closing door handles	unscrewing jars/lids	using scissors
holding a pint of liquid	putting on socks and tights	using a key to open a door	washing and wiping up
opening a ring pull on a can of drink or food	sweeping up	using a towel	

Examples of 'heavy activity' (weeks 8 +)

carrying shopping	driving	lifting boxes	using a knife to cut up meat
cleaning car	gardening	lifting children	using a tin opener
cooking, and lifting saucepans and kettles	hand washing and wringing out clothes	making a bed	vacuuming
decorating	ironing	sport (including golf, swimming, gym, cycling, running)	