

Virtual Fracture Clinic

Wrist sprains

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet aims to tell you about wrist sprains, and the treatment and outcomes you can expect if you have one.

What is a wrist sprain?

A wrist sprain is an injury to the soft tissues of the wrist. It causes pain and inflammation. The soft tissues are ligaments, muscles and tendons.

A joint is the space between bones where movement happens. Joints are held together by ligaments and crossed by tendons. These structures are not visible on X-ray. Ligaments and tendons can be stretched if exposed to a sudden force. They can also tear, though this is less common.

In some cases, ligaments can tear off a small piece of bone – this is called an **avulsion fracture**. Sprains and avulsion fractures are usually treated in the same way.

What causes a wrist sprain?

Wrist sprains are usually caused by an unexpected force through the wrist. This might be through contact with the ground, like a fall onto an outstretched hand.

What are the signs and symptoms of a wrist sprain?

If you've sprained your wrist, you may experience:

- swelling and bruising around the wrist and hand
- pain, particularly with movement
- stiffness and reduced range of motion in your wrist and fingers
- difficulty seeing your bones and knuckles clearly due to swelling

We might need to do an X-ray to check for an avulsion fracture or other bone or joint injuries.



What is the usual outcome of a wrist sprain?

Most wrist sprains heal without problems. But you might be surprised by how long these injuries take to heal fully. Ligaments heal at the same rate as bones. In some cases, they can be more painful. So, remember:

- though your pain should improve weekly, it may carry on when using your wrist for around 12 weeks
- some people experience occasional pain for up to a year, especially during heavier activities or in colder weather
- swelling can take 6 to 12 months to go away completely – your wrist may appear slightly larger permanently
- most patients regain near full strength and range of motion by three months and do not experience significant issues in day-to-day life

When can I return to daily activities?

You can return to moderate activities after around eight weeks.

You should:

- avoid contact sports for three months
- avoid activities involving impact on the hand for three months

Driving

You can decide when to drive again. But you must 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

How can I help my recovery?

Take painkillers for a few days	Painkillers can help in the first few days after the injury. But we recommend you stop them once you start to move your hand. It's important to feel some pain. It will help guide your return to activities.
Raise your wrist	If there is a lot of swelling, try to keep your wrist raised or elevated above the level of your heart. Do this for up to one week. We do not recommend doing this for a long time for mild sprains.
Apply ice	For the first few days, apply ice to the swollen area for 15 minutes, three to four times each day. Use an ice pack or bag of frozen peas. Always wrap ice in a tea towel to protect your skin.
Do gentle exercises	If your wrist is not in a splint, you can try the exercises below. Follow the instructions. You may feel mild pain when doing these, but it should go away soon after you stop. You need to focus on healing for the first few weeks, so be gentle.
Wear your splint or brace	If we've given you a splint or brace, use it for protection and rest for the first 2 to 4 weeks.
Change activity	Use your hand as normally as possible. If you have a brace or splint, use it during heavy tasks. Avoid any heavy lifting, pulling, or pushing for the first few weeks.
Keep your hand and arm mobile	You want to keep all the other joints in your hand and arm supple and flexible.

'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.

How can the hand therapy team help?

The hand therapy team can treat most wrist sprains without surgery. The aim is to restore normal movement to the wrist and hand as soon as possible. They use:

- a combination of rest and gentle movement
- techniques to reduce any swelling and pain

They may offer you a brace or splint to wear for the first two to four weeks. This will help your wrist heal. Braces can be ready-made, like the wrist splint pictured. Or you could have a thermoplastic splint moulded to fit you.

The hand therapy team will guide you. But it's important that you:

- start gentle movement early
- try to use your hand for light activities

You should expect to:

- start trying to move your wrist within 48 hours of your injury
- be able to make a full fist within one week of your injury

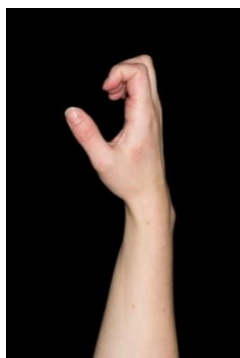


A ready-made wrist brace

Exercises

Doing the exercises below will help you avoid stiffness in your wrist and get the most movement back. So, do each exercise **five** times. Repeat this **three** times a day.

- go slowly and gently
- you may feel mild pain, but this should go away soon after you stop moving
- if you've got a removable brace or splint, take it off to do your exercises



exercises continue next page



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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