

Education

Wrist Fracture

What is a wrist fracture?

Your wrist is made up of eight bones. They attach to the bones in your forearm and the bones in your hand. A fracture is a break in a bone. When you break your wrist, you may have broken the ends of the forearm bones (radius or ulna) or one of the eight wrist bones.

How does it occur?

The usual causes of a wrist fracture are:

- a fall
- a direct blow to the wrist.

What are the symptoms?

Your wrist is painful and swollen. When the navicular bone is fractured, the area below the thumb is tender.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will examine your wrist and review your symptoms. An x-ray of your wrist may show a fracture. Sometimes a fracture may not show up in the first x-ray and your health care provider may recommend that you have a repeat x-ray in 1 to 2 weeks.

How is it treated?

- If the broken bone is crooked, your health care provider will straighten it. Your provider will give you medicine first so the straightening is not too painful.
- You may be given a splint for your wrist for a few days until the swelling begins to go down. Then your wrist will be put in a cast for 4 to 8 weeks. Certain types of fractures may need to be in a cast longer and may eventually need surgery.
- Your health care provider may prescribe anti-inflammatory medicines or other pain medicines.
- You should elevate your wrist on a pillow or the back of a chair as often as possible for the first 2 to 3 days. This will help control pain and swelling.
- You may place ice packs over the cast for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for the first 2 to 3 days. Take care not to get your cast wet if it is a plaster cast.

How long will the effects last?

Wrist fractures may take 6 to 12 weeks or longer to heal. Some fractures do not heal and require surgery. Some people may develop stiffness in their wrist.

When can I return to my normal activities?

Everyone recovers from an injury at a different rate. Return to your normal activities will be determined by how soon your wrist recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury has occurred. The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your normal activities as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury.

You may return to your normal activities when you have full range of motion in your wrist without pain. Your injured wrist, hand, and forearm need to have the same strength as the uninjured side. If you return to using your wrist too soon after a wrist fracture there could be problems with healing. It is very important to be sure that none of your activities cause wrist pain or tenderness.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your health care provider if:

- Your pain is getting worse instead of better.
- You feel that your cast is too tight and you have swelling that doesn't get better when you elevate your injury.

How can I prevent a wrist fracture?

Most wrist fractures are caused by accidents that you cannot easily prevent. However, when you do activities such as rollerblading, be sure to wear protective wrist guards.

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