

Virtual fracture clinic

5th Metacarpal Fractures

Information for patients

What is a 5th metacarpal fracture?

Your hand is made up of five metacarpal bones that connect your fingers and thumb to your wrist. A 5th metacarpal fracture (also known as a boxer's fracture) is a break in the bone that connects your little finger to your wrist. A break is the same as a fracture.



What causes a 5th metacarpal fracture?

5th metacarpal fractures usually occur when there is impact between a hand that is closed in a fist with a firm object, such as the ground or a wall. 5th metacarpal fractures are the most commonly occurring fractures in the hand.

What are the signs and symptoms of a 5th metacarpal fracture?

If you have fractured your 5th metacarpal bone you may notice that the back of your hand and the little finger are swollen and it will be more difficult to see the knuckles. You may also have some bruising and find it difficult to open and close your fingers.

An x-ray should be taken to check the position of the fracture.

What are the treatments available for a 5th metacarpal fracture?

Most 5th metacarpal fractures are successfully treated without surgery. Even in cases where the alignment of the bone fragments is disrupted, the bones usually heal without any serious long term consequences.

The options for non-surgical management are usually to:

1. 'Buddy strap' the little finger to the ring finger for two to four weeks and move it as pain allows

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2. Support the hand in a plaster cast or plastic splint initially and then move the finger as pain allows

You may require an operation if:

1. You have an open fracture (the bone has poked through the skin)
2. When you bend your fingers they don't line up, or they cross over each other
3. You have lost sensation or blood supply to the finger

What is the usual outcome after a 5th metacarpal fracture?

Most 5th metacarpal fractures heal without problems. It may take several months for any swelling to resolve and to feel like you have full strength and flexibility in the hand. Occasionally the large knuckle of the little finger will be less prominent. This will not interfere with your ability to use your hand.

When can I return to work and sport after a 5th metacarpal fracture?

You should avoid any heavy gripping, pulling and pushing for the first few weeks after your injury but you can use your hand immediately for light activities such as feeding / drinking / dressing / typing and light housework. You should avoid contact sports and heavy manual work until you feel like you have full mobility and strength in your wrist and hand.

If you require a Statement of Fitness to Work (sick note) you should contact your GP and take this information and any other documentation from the hospital. You can find more information about Fitness to Work at <http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1062.aspx>

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

There are a couple of things that you can do to optimise your recovery:

1. Basic painkillers and anti-inflammatories like paracetamol or ibuprofen can help manage pain and swelling. Please speak to your local pharmacist if you are unsure as to which medications you can safely use
2. It is important that you try to keep your hand elevated above the level of your heart for the first one to two weeks to minimise the swelling in the hand. However you should avoid wearing a sling as this can cause discomfort in the shoulder and neck
3. You should also try to move your fingers, opening and closing your hand in a fist, as much as you can. This will help with the bone healing and prevent the finger from becoming stiff
4. You should try to use your hand as normally as possible within the buddy straps or the cast / splint but you should avoid any heavy lifting, pulling or pushing for the first six weeks after your fracture
5. You should also make sure to maintain the normal movement in all the other joints of your hand and upper limb by moving them regularly

What exercises should I do?

To avoid stiffness and to optimise the return of movement, perform the exercises below five to ten times, five times each day:



It is normal for these exercises to feel uncomfortable when the fingers are stiff. If they become too easy you can stop doing them.



Who can I contact for more information?

Please look at our website which has educational information for patients and professionals
www.londonvirtualfractureclinic.co.uk

Please note the phone line is open **Wednesday mornings** only.

From: 9:00am to 11:00am

Please call: 02033125990

Or email: VirtualFractureClinic@imperial.nhs.uk

To speak to someone about hand therapy appointments

Please telephone 0203311 0333

How do I make a comment about my treatment?

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 pals@imperial.nhs.uk. 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