

## Virtual Fracture Clinic

# Suspected scaphoid fractures

## Information for patients

### What is a scaphoid fracture?

The scaphoid is one of eight small bones (called the carpal bones) of the wrist. It is located at the base of the hand, on the same side as the thumb. A scaphoid fracture is a break in this bone (a break is the same as a fracture).



### What causes a scaphoid fracture?

Scaphoid fractures are usually caused by an unexpected force through the wrist and hand. This might be through contact with the ground, such as a fall onto an outstretched hand.

### What are the signs and symptoms of a scaphoid fracture?

Pain or tenderness at the base of the thumb can be a sign of a scaphoid fracture however this can also occur with a wrist sprain or bone bruising. It can initially be quite difficult to diagnose a scaphoid fracture from an x-ray as often the fracture is not visible until it is a week to two weeks after the injury. It may be necessary to have a repeat x-ray or occasionally an MRI scan. If the doctor or nurse who sees you first is unsure they may start treatment for a scaphoid fracture 'just in case' and refer you on to the fracture clinic. It is important that you attend any clinic or radiology(xray or scan) appointments.



### What are the treatments available for a scaphoid fracture?

Many scaphoid fractures are successfully treated by immobilising (to stop movement) the wrist in a plaster cast for eight weeks. It is important during this time that you do not use the hand or move the wrist without the cast or brace in place.

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In some instances, the fracture may occur near the base of the scaphoid, in an area that has a poor blood supply. If this is the case, you may require an operation.

Regardless of whether your scaphoid fracture is treated with a cast or if it requires surgery, it is very important that you move your fingers and that you are able to make a full fist within one to two weeks of your injury. Exercises to help you do this are outlined below.

After removal of your cast or after your operation you may be referred to the hand therapy team as it is important that you start gentle movement early and that you try to use the hand for light activities. The aim of treatment is to restore normal movement to the wrist and hand as soon as possible.

## What is the usual outcome after a scaphoid fracture?

Most scaphoid 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 wrist and hand. Gripping, full weight bearing and repetitive work can be uncomfortable for up to a year after the injury.

## When can I return to work and sport after a wrist sprain?

You should avoid any heavy gripping, pulling and pushing for the first six to eight 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 for eight to 12 weeks.

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 and wrist elevated above the level of your heart for the first one to two weeks to minimise the swelling in the wrist. However you should avoid wearing a sling as this can cause discomfort in the shoulder and neck.
3. You should try to move your fingers, opening and closing your hand in a fist as much as you can. This will help with the tissue healing and prevent the finger from stiffening.
4. You should try to use your hand as normally as possible within the brace or splint but you should avoid any heavy lifting, pulling or pushing for the first six to eight weeks after your injury.
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?

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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.

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## Who can I contact for more information?

Please look at our website which has educational information for patients and professionals

[www.londonvirtualfractureclinic.co.uk](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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