

Virtual fracture clinic

# Wrist sprains

## Information for patients

### What is a wrist sprain?

Movement of the wrist occurs at the joints between the eight small bones (called the carpal bones) of the wrist and the two long bones (the radius and the ulna) of the forearm. The bones are held in place by strong ligaments which encircle the bones and control the direction of movement when the tendons and muscles contract. These ligaments can be overstretched and some of the fibres may tear when the wrist unexpectedly contacts a firm object or is suddenly twisted. This is termed a 'wrist sprain'.

In some cases a ligament can tear off a small piece of bone when the sprain occurs. This is termed an 'avulsion fracture'.



### 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, such as a fall onto an outstretched hand. Quite frequently this injury happens during sporting activities.

### What are the signs and symptoms of a wrist sprain?

If you have sprained your wrist you may notice swelling and bruising around the wrist and in the hand. You may experience some pain, particularly with movement. It may be more difficult to see the bones and knuckles and you might find that your wrist and fingers feel stiff.

It is necessary to take an x-ray to check for an avulsion fracture and to ensure there are no other bone or joint injuries in the area.

### What are the treatments available for a wrist sprain?

Most wrist sprains are successfully treated without surgery through a combination of rest and gentle movement, as well as techniques to reduce any swelling and pain. The aim of treatment is to restore normal movement to the wrist and hand as soon as possible.

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You may find it beneficial to wear a pre-fabricated brace or bespoke thermoplastic splint for the first two to four weeks. It is important that you start gentle movement early and that you try to use the hand for light activities. You should expect to start trying to move the wrist within 48 hours of the injury and to be able to make a full fist within one week of the injury. Exercises to help you do this are outlined below.

These injuries, even in the presence of an avulsion fracture, rarely require surgery.

## What is the usual outcome after a wrist sprain?

Most wrist sprains heal without problems. It may take several months for any swelling to resolve and to feel like you have regained 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 few weeks after your injury but you can use your hand immediately for light activities such as eating / 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?

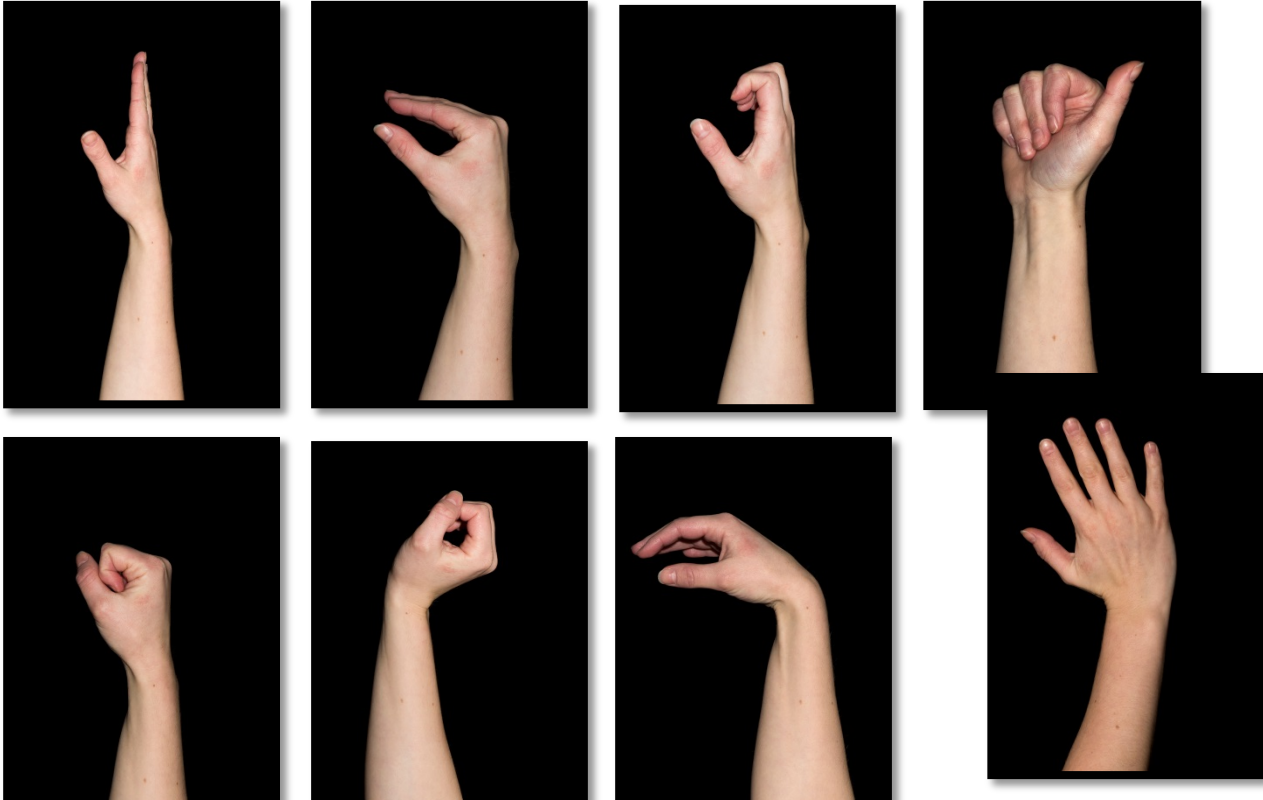
There are a couple of things that you can do to optimise your recovery:

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 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. 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. If it starts to feel uncomfortable do not continue.
4. You should try to move your fingers, opening and closing your hand in a fist, and your wrist as much as you can. This will help with the tissue healing and prevent the fingers from becoming stiff.
5. 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 few weeks after your injury.
6. You should also keep all the other joints of your hand and arm supple and flexible.

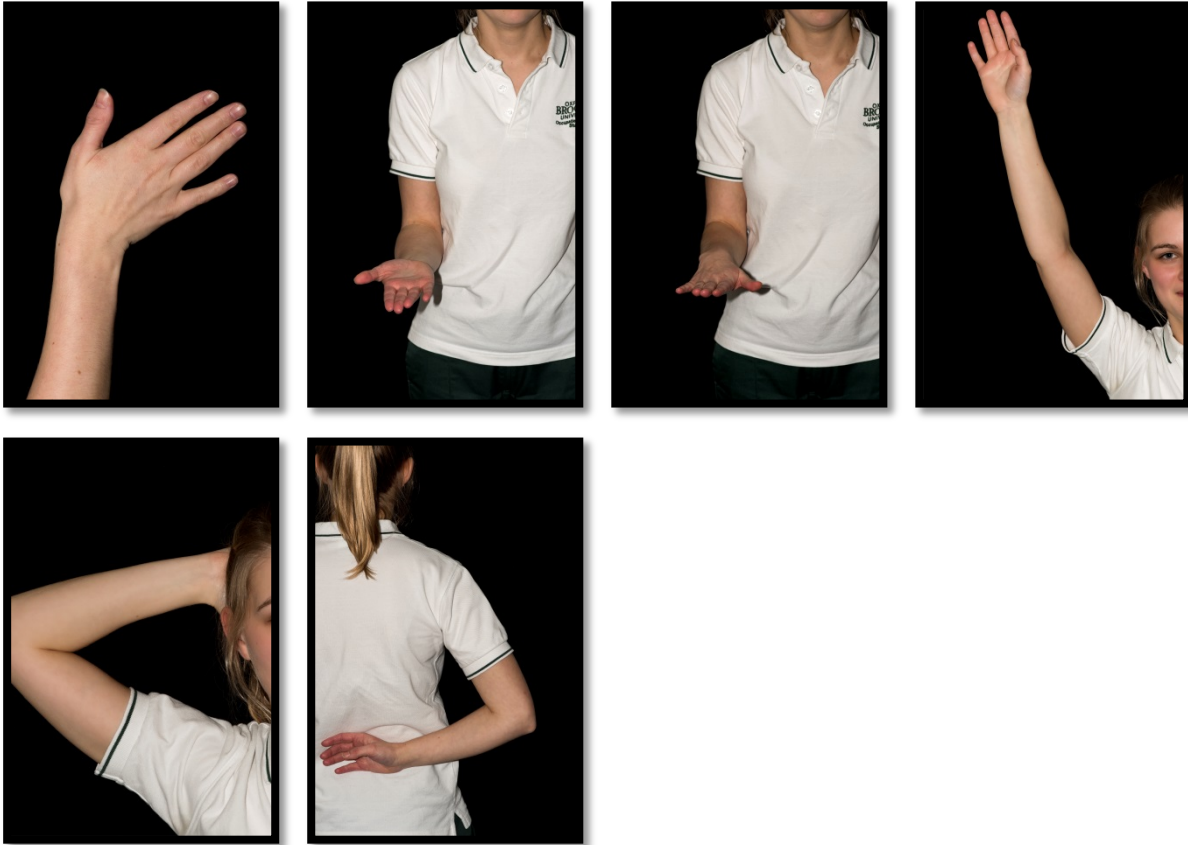
## What exercises should I do?

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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. If you have been provided with a removable brace or splint, you can take this off to perform your exercises.



It is normal for these exercises to feel uncomfortable if the fingers and wrist 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 material 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

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## 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