



**University
Hospitals Sussex**
NHS Foundation Trust

Facial fractures

Accident and emergency

Patient information

What is a facial fracture?

A facial fracture is a break in one or more of the bones in your face. This can involve:

- The nose (nasal bone)
- Cheekbones (zygoma)
- Bones around the eyes (orbit)
- The upper jaw (maxilla) or lower jaw (mandible).

If you have a facial fracture, we will refer you to a specialist team, usually the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery or ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat) team.

What causes facial fractures?

Facial fractures are usually caused by:

- Physical assaults.
- Sports injuries (like rugby, football, horse riding).
- Accidents (like falls or road traffic collisions).

How are facial fractures diagnosed?

Your clinician (doctor or nurse) will:

- Ask about your injury, symptoms, and medical history
- Examine your face for signs such as swelling, tenderness, or difficulty moving parts of your face
- Request X-rays or scans to confirm the fracture.

Some small fractures may not be visible at first and might need follow-up scans.

What treatments are available?

Treatment depends on:

- The type of fracture
- Whether the bones are aligned properly
- Any other injuries you may have.

In most cases, no surgery is needed. The bones are in the correct position and will heal on their own within 3–6 weeks.

If the bones are not aligned properly, surgery may be needed to:

- Realign the bones ('reduce' the fracture).
- Stabilise them with plates, screws, or wires.

Your specialist surgeon will explain your treatment options clearly.

You may also be prescribed antibiotics, depending on the nature of your injury.

Be aware

If your cheekbone is fractured, please avoid blowing your nose for 10 days after the injury. This is to prevent air from your sinuses escaping into the skin, which may cause temporary swelling around your eyes. This swelling will go away on its own.

To allow proper healing, avoid any bumps or knocks to your face for at least 6–8 weeks. Any impact could shift the fractured bone.

What if my face feels numb or strange after the injury?

It is common to feel numbness or odd sensations after a facial injury. This happens because small nerves in your face may be bruised or stretched during the injury.

These nerves control feeling (touch, pain, temperature) or movement (facial expressions). Recovery depends on the extent of the damage.

- Sensation usually returns in weeks or months
- In some cases, recovery is partial or does not fully return.

Your doctor can explain what to expect based on your specific injury.

How long does healing take?

Swelling and bruising typically improve within 2–3 weeks.

- Full healing of the bone may take 6–8 weeks or longer
- You will start to look and feel more normal after the swelling goes down.

If you have concerns about your recovery, contact your GP or hospital team for further advice.

When to seek help

Seek immediate medical help if you have:

- Increasing pain
- Redness or swelling around a wound
- Fever (a possible sign of infection)
- Vision problems
- Vomiting
- Unusual drowsiness
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing.

General support

For general medical advice please use the NHS website, the NHS 111 service, walk-in-centres, or your GP.

The NHS website www.nhs.uk provides online health information and guidance.

There are walk-in and urgent treatment services at Brighton Station, Crawley Urgent Treatment Centre, Lewes Victoria Hospital, Horsham Minor Injuries Unit and Bognor Regis War Memorial Hospital.

This information is intended for patients receiving care in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath.

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