



University  
Hospitals Sussex  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Distal radius fracture

Information for patients who need  
a follow-up appointment after 1 week.

Physiotherapy department

Patient information

## What is this information about?

This information is about looking after your distal radius fracture. This is a break to the wrist bone on the thumb side of the wrist. A fracture means the same as a broken bone.

### It tells you:

- What exercises you can do to help your bone heal
- What signs to look for that may mean you need further help
- Who to contact if you need further help or support.

## How long will my distal radius fracture take to heal?

This normally takes about 6 weeks to heal. You will be in a backslab initially.



## Will smoking slow down the healing process?

Yes. Smoking will slow down your healing. We would advise that you stop smoking while your fracture heals. Talk to your GP or go to [www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk) for more information.

## Will I have any pain and swelling?

You may have wrist and hand pain and swelling for 3 to 6 months after your injury. Swelling is often worse at the end of the day. Taking pain medication and elevating (raising) your wrist will help. More information is on the next page.

## Should I keep using my arm?

It is important to keep the fingers, thumb, elbow and shoulder moving to prevent stiffness (see below, Stage 1 exercises in the cast). It is important to start exercises as soon as possible. Instructions are on the next page.

## Will I have a follow up appointment?

There is a small chance that this fracture can displace (move). We routinely recommend a repeat x-ray at about 1 week.

If you have not received this appointment within one week of receipt of getting this letter, please contact the fracture clinic reception on **01903 205111 Ext. 85499**.

## If I am over 50, do I need a bone health check?

If your injury happened from a standing height or less (even if it was not a hard fall) this may be a fragility fracture. This could be a sign of osteoporosis (weaker bones).

Please contact your GP for a discussion about having a bone health check or call us for more information. For more information go to [www.theros.org.uk](http://www.theros.org.uk)

## When should I contact Virtual Fracture Clinic?

Please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic if you:

- Are concerned about your symptoms
- Cannot follow this rehabilitation plan
- Have not received your appointment letter.

## How should I care for my injury? Week 0 to 6.

### Managing your pain and swelling:

Elevate (raise) your wrist to reduce swelling for the first few days. Keep your hand high above the level of the heart (see picture). If you go out, you may wish to continue to use the sling.

## Exercises: stage 1 (in the cast)

Do these exercises 3-4 times a day. Start straight away, working within your pain levels.

### Finger exercises:



Keep your fingers moving whilst you are in the plaster.

### Elbow bend to straighten:



Bend and straighten your elbow as far as you can without pain.

### Forearm Twists:



Begin this exercise with your elbow at your side and bent to 90 degrees. Slowly turn your palm up to the ceiling and down to the floor as far as you can go without pain.

You should not feel more than a mild to moderate stretch.

You can use your other arm to assist if necessary.

**Repeat 10 - 15 times** if there is no increase in pain.

## How should I care for my injury? After week 6.

You will return to clinic 1 week to 10 days after your injury for a review. At this time, your cast is likely to be removed and replaced with a new fiberglass cast. You may also have a check x-ray so allow some time for your appointment.

When your full cast is removed (between 4 to 6 weeks), you should start to move your wrist and do simple light tasks with your arm as pain allows.

### Exercises: stage 2 (once cast removed)



#### Finger and wrist flexion and extension

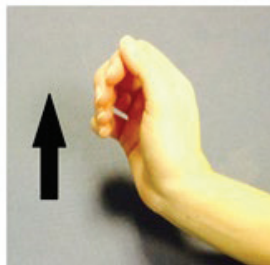
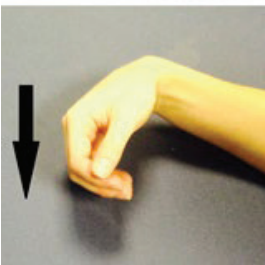
Open and close your hand as shown 10-15 times.

Then move your wrist up and down 10-15 times.

After a few days, hold a soft ball / ball of socks.

Squeeze the ball as hard as possible without pain.

**Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 10 times.**



#### Pronation and supination (twisting)

Bend your elbow to 90° and turn your wrist palm down then palm up.

**Repeat 10 - 15 times** if there is no increase in pain.

## What should I do if I am still having problems?

Contact your consultant's secretary for a follow up appointment if you are struggling to recover your movement or return to activity.

## My cast feels too tight. What do I do?

Make sure you are elevating your arm enough to keep the swelling down. Check that you are still able to wriggle your fingers and they are a good colour.

If you are worried or need more advice contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic Team or Plaster Room.

**Worthing:** [01903 205111 Ext. 85445](tel:01903205111) or

**Chichester:** [01243 788122 Ext. 33393](tel:01243788122)

## My symptoms have changed. What do I do?

If you have any of these symptoms, please get in touch:

- Increasing joint pain
- Increasing swelling with difficulty to bend the fingers/thumb
- Hypersensitivity to touching the skin
- Shiny/red skin
- Increased hair growth on skin
- A sensation of the hand not belonging to you.

## When can I start driving?

You can return to driving when:

- You are no longer in a cast
- You can perform an emergency stop pain free.

Always test your ability to drive in a safe environment first.

## How can I get a note for work?

Please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic.

## I have not received my appointment letter. What do I do?

For your first appointment if you have not received your appointment letter or a text message, please contact us. If you need to book a follow up appointment, please contact the fracture clinic on **01903 205111 Ext. 85499**.

## How do I contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic?

Call or leave a message on:

**Worthing**    **01903 205111 Ext. 86312**

**St Richards**    **01243 788122 Ext. 35503**

**[uhsussex.vfc@nhs.net](mailto:uhsussex.vfc@nhs.net)**

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in St Richard's Hospital and Worthing Hospital.

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