

# Wrist Fractures



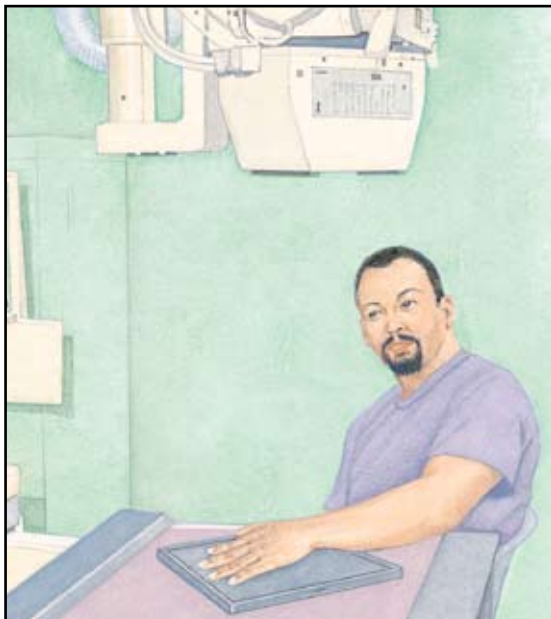
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# What Is a Fracture?

A fracture is a break in any bone. Fractures can range from a tiny hairline crack to a bone that has broken through the skin (called an open fracture). In many cases, fractures can cause pain, throbbing, and swelling. You also may have limited wrist, hand, and arm motion.

## How a Fracture Is Found

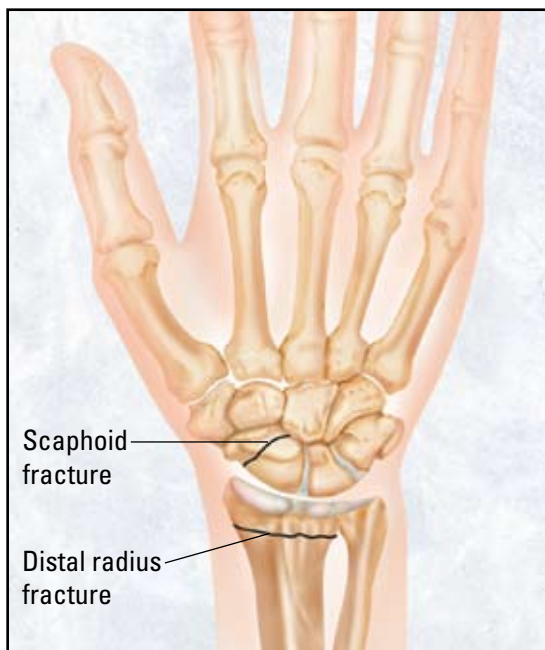
Your doctor will check your wrist. Your **range of motion** (how well you can move the injured wrist and hand) also will be tested. An imaging test can then confirm a fractured bone (which is the same as a broken bone). The imaging test done most often is an **x-ray**. In some cases, you may have a **CT** (computed tomography) or **MRI** (magnetic resonance imaging). These imaging tests show more detail than an x-ray. They may be done for hard-to-find fractures.



An x-ray is the most common imaging test done to confirm a wrist fracture.

# Inside Your Wrist

Your wrist is like a bridge between your forearm and hand. Its many bones let you turn and twist your hand. When one of these bones becomes fractured, you may not have full use of your hand or arm.



## Which Bone Is Broken?

The most common type of wrist fracture is a **distal radius fracture**. The distal radius is at the very end of the main bone in your forearm. Less common is a **scaphoid fracture**. The scaphoid is a small bone at the base of your thumb. Scaphoid fractures can be hard to find and treat. Both distal radius and scaphoid fractures often occur after falling on an outstretched hand.

# Treating Wrist Fractures

A fractured bone starts to heal on its own right away. But a treatment called **reduction** helps you heal better. Reduction is a process that repositions your bones. The goal is to get them as close as possible to how they were before the fracture. Your doctor will use one or more methods of reduction.

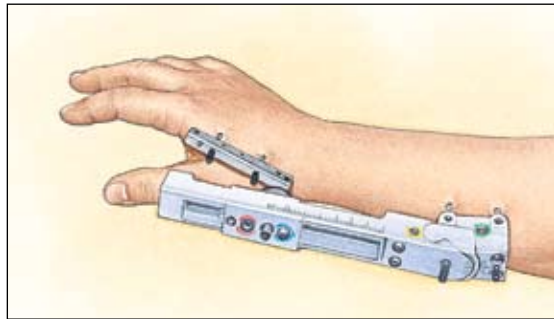
## Closed Reduction

Your doctor **sets** (positions) the injured bone without surgery. You'll then have one of these:

**Splint.** A curved, firm support that's secured across the injured region.

**Cast.** Hard material that surrounds and protects the fractured region.

**External fixator.** A rigid bar that screws into the bone through tiny holes made in the skin.



An external fixator holds the fractured segments of bone in place.

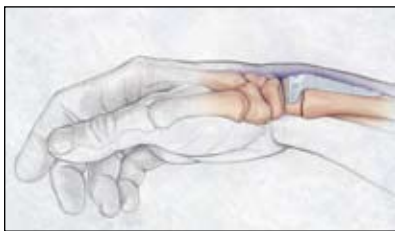
## Open Reduction

In **open reduction**, your doctor sets the bone by doing surgery. You also may need internal hardware. You and your doctor will discuss whether it will be removed later. The hardware may include:

**Pin.** A thin wire that's drilled across a fracture. It holds the bone together.

**Screw.** Hardware that looks like a normal screw. It pulls fractured segments together.

**Plate.** A metal strip that covers the bone, including the fractured region. It's held in place by tiny screws.



A plate with tiny screws helps keep the bone stable and in place.

## The Road to Healing

Fractures take about 6 weeks to heal. Keeping your hand and wrist raised can control swelling, throbbing, and pain. Your doctor may prescribe medicine that can help reduce pain. If you have a cast, keep it wrapped in a plastic bag when you bathe or shower. And don't remove a splint unless your doctor says you can. Call your doctor if your pain gets worse or if you notice any excess swelling or redness.



# Your Role in Healing

Keep your hand and wrist raised as much as you can soon after your fracture. When you're able, start moving the injured wrist. Your doctor or other healthcare provider will teach you movements that can help you heal. You'll soon regain the wrist motion you'll need to get back to your daily tasks.



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