

Wrist Fracture (Distal Radius/Ulna) – Patient Information

What is it?

A break near the end of the radius or ulna (forearm bones), often caused by falling on an outstretched hand.

Healing Time:

Most fractures take 6–8 weeks to heal.

Treatment:

May be managed with a cast or splint.
Some cases require manipulation or surgery.

Instructions:

- Elevate your hand above heart level to reduce swelling (especially in the first 48–72 hours)
- Wiggle your fingers regularly to keep them mobile
- Continue gentle movement of your fingers, elbow and shoulder to prevent stiffness
- Avoid lifting, pushing, or pulling with the injured wrist
- Use the hand for light activities only if comfortable
- Keep rings and tight jewellery off the injured hand
- Check the skin around the cast or splint daily for irritation

Pain Relief:

Use paracetamol or ibuprofen
Ice packs (wrapped in a cloth) can help with swelling

Bone Healing Tips:

Avoid smoking or vaping, as this can slow bone healing
Eat a balanced diet with enough protein, calcium, and vitamin D

Red Flags – Call if you notice:

- Fingers turning blue or white
Severe pain not controlled with medication
Numbness or tingling in the fingers
- Increasing swelling or tightness that does not improve with elevation
- Inability to move your fingers
- Signs of infection (increasing redness, discharge, bad smell from the cast, or fever)

Follow-Up:

You'll have a review at the fracture clinic in 1–2 weeks and possibly an X-ray.
Once the bone has healed, physiotherapy or exercises may be required to restore movement and strength.

Exercises While Your Arm Is in a Cast or Brace

Even though your wrist/forearm is immobilised, it's important to keep the rest of your arm moving to reduce stiffness, swelling, and weakness. These exercises are **safe to do while wearing your cast or brace**, unless your clinician has told you otherwise.

What to remember

- Do exercises **2–3 times per day**
- Movements should be **gentle and pain-free**
- **Do not remove** your cast or brace
- Stop if you feel sharp pain, increased swelling, or numbness

Exercises you can do

Fingers

- Open and close your hand fully
- Bend and straighten each finger
- Make a gentle fist, then stretch your fingers out
Repeat 10 times

Thumb

- Move your thumb away from your palm and back
- Touch the tip of your thumb to each finger if possible
Repeat 10 times

Elbow

- Bend and straighten your elbow as far as comfortable
Repeat 10–15 times

Shoulder

- Lift your arm forward and lower it
- Lift your arm out to the side and lower it
- Roll your shoulders gently backwards and forwards
Repeat 10 times each

Swelling control

- Keep your hand **elevated** when resting
- Gently **wiggle your fingers often**
- Use a sling only if advised