

Patient information

# Wrist or hand fracture

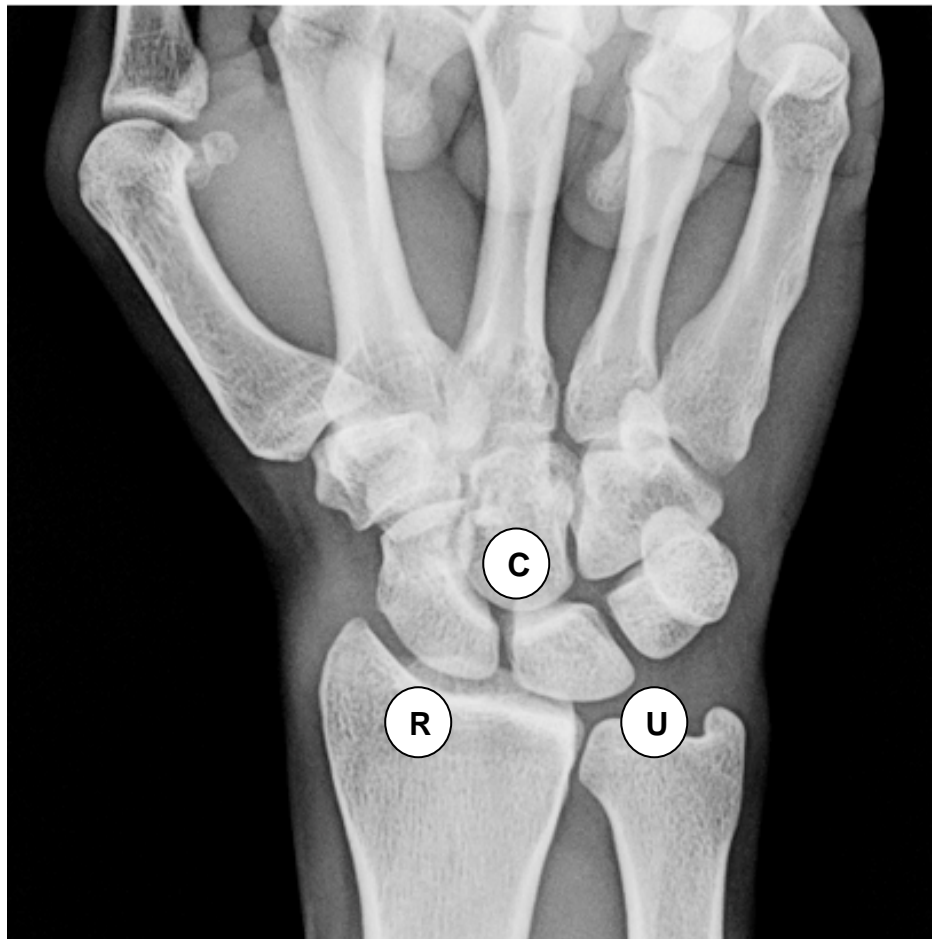
**Barts Health Physiotherapy Website:**

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## What has happened to my wrist?

A fracture is a break or divide in a bone. The wrist is made up of 2 long bones of the forearm, and lots of little bones in the wrist itself. The most common trauma is a fall onto an outstretched hand.



Examination by a medical professional and an X-ray will be used to diagnose a fracture. A fracture can be in the radius (R)

or the ulna (U) or could involve one of the small carpal bones in the wrist (C)

To ensure the bones heal, and in the correct alignment, you may be placed in a cast for 4-6 weeks. With more serious fractures, an operation may have been required to hold the bones in place as they heal. This involves using plates or screws which may remain in your wrist.

## **Common symptoms**

### **Pain and stiffness of the fingers, wrist, elbow or shoulder.**

- The cast will stop the bones moving while they heal, but this will also stop the soft tissues of the wrist moving too. This includes the muscles, skin and connecting tissue. Soft tissue is very elastic, and if it is not kept moving regularly it can get stiff.
- In order to restore the flexibility to the wrist, gentle exercising is essential to get it moving. This will be painful at first, so it is important you take your time and you understand you are not causing harm by stretching. Little and often is a good start. As the flexibility improves, you may have to work harder to regain the full range of movement.

- If you were prescribed painkillers, it may be useful to take these before you exercise. This will make it more comfortable

### **Sensitivity of the skin around the fingers or wrist**

- This is a normal side-effect of being in a cast. This will improve with movement and use, but it is important you force yourself to get it moving.
- Sometimes being worried about your wrist can make it more sensitive. It is important to realise sensitivity will reduce with time, but is more likely to get better if you gradually increase the use of your hand and wrist over time.

### **Weakness of the finger, wrist and arm muscles.**

- As the muscles of the wrist and hand were kept in a cast, they will have lost strength. In order to return this, the muscles must be challenged through gentle exercise.
- As the strength improves, the exercises will have to be more challenging. This will increase the strength further.

- Some pain when you put more demands on the wrist is normal, but ensures the increase in force or weight is gradual.

### **Dryness of the skin**

- This is a normal side-effect of being in a cast. Use moisturiser or cream to reduce the dryness. This can also help with reducing any sensitivity, and get the wrist used to being touched and used.

### **Apprehension or fear of movement**

- It is very normal to be worried about moving your wrist after it has come out of plaster. The pain and stiffness may be an unpleasant experience, but it is important to try and overcome this to get the wrist moving.
- It is a good idea to try and do a little more each week until you return to normal. Family members may have to help in the first few weeks, but in order to return to normal you must try and do things for yourself. A little pain is normal when you try and do new things, but this is unlikely to be causing damage.

- As your function improves, you may have to work harder to return to normal movement. It can take a number of weeks to return to normal.

## **What can I do to help recover from my fracture?**

Exercise is essential for getting the bones of your hand and wrist moving normally. You may be required to see a physiotherapist which the Doctor can arrange. Here are some exercises to get started:

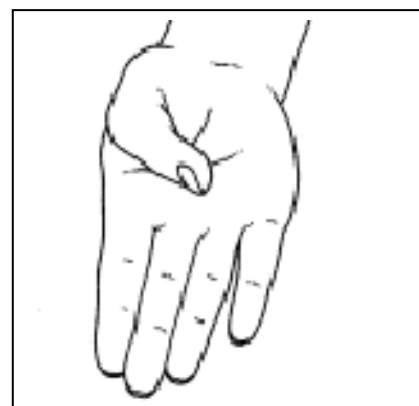
### **Remember**

- Some pain when you encourage the stiff parts of your wrist is normal, but this will get better with exercise.
- Take your time, try and do the exercises regularly and try and keep pushing a bit further each time
- An ice pack after exercise can help with any post-exercise soreness
- Try and do the exercises every 1-2 hours and move onto the advanced exercises within 2 weeks of plaster removal. As the stiffness reduces, you may be able to reduce how frequently you do them.

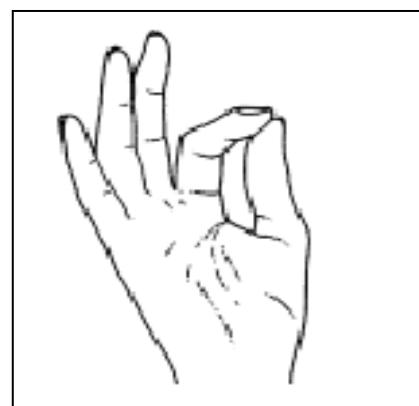
## Specific Exercises

### Fingers/thumb

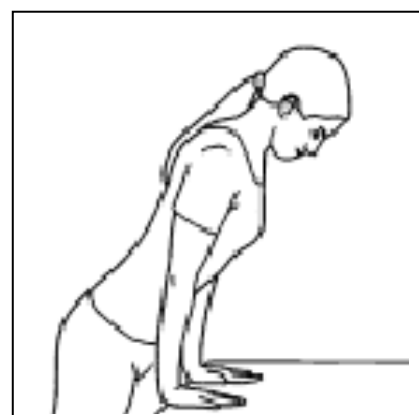
Practice bending your fingers so the tip touches the bottom of the finger, not the palm. Use your 'good' hand to encourage the finger to bend. Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 5 times each.



Touch the tip of the thumb with the tip of each finger. Pinch together for 5 seconds, repeat 5 times each.



Put your palm flat on the table and push each finger down until it is fully straight. When you can do that, lift the tip of the finger up, feeling the stretch in your palm. Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 5 times each.



Make a fist and squeeze tightly.  
Make sure you open your hand and  
fingers as much as you can after.  
Squeeze and straighten for 5  
seconds, repeat 5 times each.

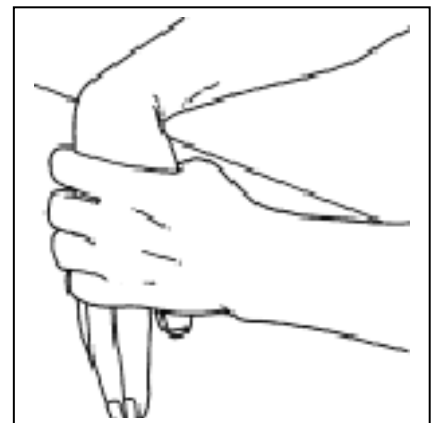


## Wrist

Place your palms together and  
gently push with the good  
wrist, bending the wrist  
backwards while keeping the  
fingers straight. Hold for 5  
seconds, repeat 5 times.

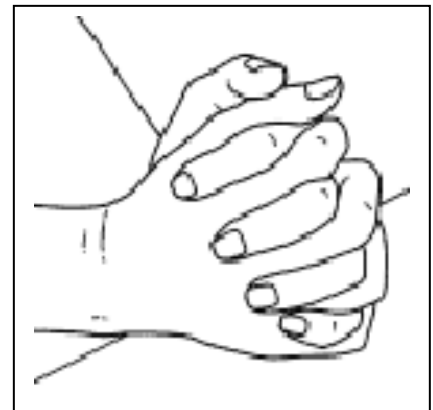


Place the good hand on top of  
the bad and bend it down.  
Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 5  
times.

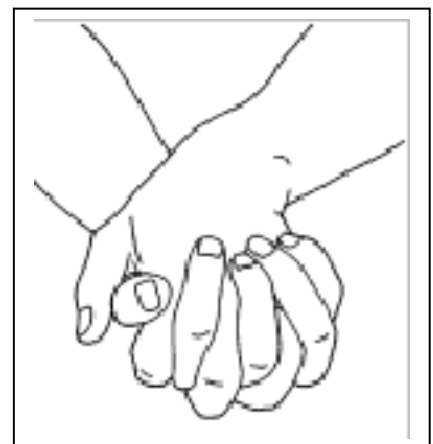




Link the fingers together and bend the wrist away and towards you, keeping the elbow still. Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 5 times each.



Turn your palm over to face the ceiling, use your other hand to turn it over a bit further. Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 5 times.

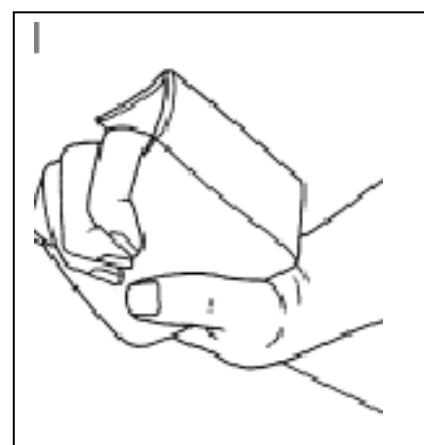


## Advanced exercises

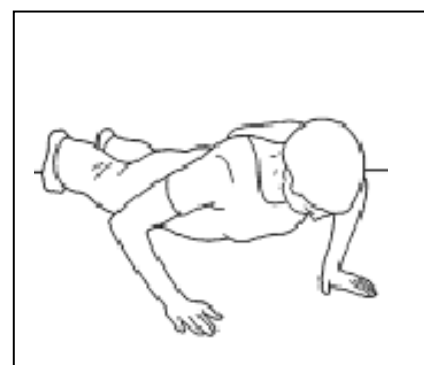
Put your palms face down on a table and lean forwards. You should feel the stretching in the palm and wrist. Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 5 times.



Hang your wrist over the edge of a table with a weight in your hand. Lift the weight up keeping the forearm on the table. Hold for 5 seconds, repeat 5 times.



You can practice press-ups or chin ups as your pain and strength improves.



## What if my symptoms do not improve?

If your pain does not improve with the exercises or your pain and symptoms increase, please consult your GP for further management.

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