

Frequently asked questions

For how long will I experience swelling and/or discomfort in my wrist and hand?

Expect swelling/discomfort for up to one year after fracture, especially around the little finger side of the wrist. This is normal and does not mean there is anything to worry about. Your wrist and hand may also be very sensitive. Keep your wrist and hand moving to ease this and ask your physiotherapist for advice.

Why does my wrist look a funny shape?

As a fracture heals, new bone is formed which joins the broken ends together. This can result in a lump forming. It will gradually smooth out over 12 to 18 months.

When can I start driving again?

This varies, and can be as much as eight weeks after your cast is removed. You can start driving when you have enough movement and strength to hold the steering wheel firmly and control the car safely.

Should I stop the exercises if my wrist swells or aches?

It is normal to expect some increase in swelling or mild soreness when doing the exercises. Please seek advice from your physiotherapist. You can take simple painkillers such as paracetamol to help.

What activities can I start to do?

Light housework such as washing up will help to get your hand and wrist moving, but avoid lifting the kettle or heavy pots.

Are you aged over 50?

People who are over 50 who break a bone should be referred automatically for a DEXA scan to check for bone fragility. If you haven't had an appointment and you think you should have one, please ask your GP, physiotherapist or hospital doctor. Vitamin D and calcium are important for healthy bones. For further information visit: www.nhsinform.scot

Further Information

Further injury advice and prevention can be found at:

NHSinform - www.nhsinform.scot

National Osteoporosis Society - www.nos.org.uk

NHS Western Isles Physiotherapy Department:

Western Isles Hospital
MacAulay Road
Stornoway
Isle of Lewis HS1 2AF
Tel. 01851 708258

Uist and Barra Hospital
Balivanich
Benbecula
HS7 5LA
Tel. 01870 603641

We are listening - how did we do?

We welcome your feedback, as it helps us evaluate the services we provide. If you would like to tell us about your experience:

- speak to a member of staff
- visit our website: www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/feedback or share your story at: www.careopinion.org.uk or tel. 0800 122 31 35
- tel. 01851 708069 Monday-Friday between 9am-5.30pm.

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Disclaimer

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NHS Western Isles

Getting your wrist moving after your cast is removed



Useful information and advice

This leaflet is aimed at providing useful advice now that your cast has been removed.

Information will support the advice given by your physiotherapist and consultant. Following this advice and doing the exercises suggested will help your injury to heal properly and reduce stiffness in your joints.

What is a broken wrist?

- A fracture is the same as a break.
- It normally involves a break to the radius and ulna, the two main bones in your forearm.

What should I expect on removal of my cast?

It is normal for your wrist to feel vulnerable once out of plaster because it hasn't been moved for a long time.

It is important that swelling, pain, strength and stiffness are addressed following the removal of the plaster.

Pain

It is normal to have some pain once your cast comes off. You should take the painkillers you have been prescribed. If the pain is severe, you should contact your GP, Emergency Department or NHS24 by telephoning 111.

Swelling

Swelling is common once you start moving again. It reduces your ability to move your wrist. To minimise swelling, try the following:

- use a sling to keep your wrist up
- use pillows to keep your wrist up at night and when sitting
- pump your fingers open and closed to boost circulation
- gently massage your forearm and hand using a general moisturiser. You should include any scar tissue as this will help it stay supple and stretchy.

Stiffness

Your wrist, fingers and thumb will be stiff. It is important to try and get as much movement as possible in your joints now that the fracture has healed. Exercising and stretching will reduce the stiffness.

Strength

The muscles in your arm and hand will be weak after being out of use. You should increase how much you use your arm gradually. Do not force yourself into pain. Your physiotherapist will guide you.

Early exercises

How much exercise?

Exercise, like medication, requires a specific dose. Not enough will be of no benefit, and too much may do harm. Only exercise to a comfortable level. Mild discomfort is normal, as long as it settles during the day.

The following exercises can be started as soon as your cast is removed and carried out four times a day until review by your physiotherapist.

It helps to soak your arm in warm water before exercising.

Daily exercises



Repeat the following exercises five times each and do them four times a day.

Shoulders: Standing or sitting in an upright position, slowly lift your affected arm up towards the ceiling (elbow straight) and then lower again. Repeat five times.



Elbows:

1. Sitting in an upright position, slowly bend your elbow so your hand moves towards your shoulder and then fully straighten your elbow.
2. With your elbow tucked in, turn your hand over and back again.



Wrist: Sitting in an upright position at a table, raise your forearm up on a book.

1. Lift and lower your hand as far as you can.
2. Tilt your wrist from side to side.
3. Circle your hand clockwise and then anticlockwise.



Fingers: Make a full fist and then stretch your fingers out.



Thumb:

1. Stretch your thumb as far away from your hand as possible, then reach to the base of your little finger.
2. Run your thumb up and down each of your fingers.

Remember - do not push into pain.