

# WRIST FRACTURE

The radius is the larger of the two bones of the forearm. The end of the radius near the wrist is called the distal end. A fracture of the distal radius occurs when the area of the radius near the wrist breaks. Distal radius fractures are very common. The radius is the most commonly broken bone in the arm.

The most common cause of a distal radius fracture is a fall onto an outstretched arm. Osteoporosis (a disorder in which bones become fragile and more likely to break) can make a relatively minor fall result in a broken wrist. Many distal radius fractures in people older than 60 years of age are caused by a fall from a standing position. A broken wrist can happen even in healthy bones, if the force of the trauma is severe enough.

## How is a Wrist Fracture Diagnosed?

To confirm the diagnosis, the doctor will order x-rays of the wrist. X-rays will show if the bone is broken and whether there is displacement. They can also show how many pieces of broken bone there are.

## What are the Treatment Options?

Treatment of broken bones follows one basic rule: the broken pieces must be put back into position and prevented from moving out of place until they are healed. There are many treatment options for a distal radius fracture. The choice depends on many factors, such as the nature of the fracture, your age, and activity level.

### Nonsurgical Treatment

If the broken bone is in a good position, a cast may be applied until the bone heals. If the position of the bone is out of place and likely to limit the future use of your arm, it may be necessary to re-align the broken bone fragments. "Reduction" is the technical term for the process in which the doctor moves the broken bones into place. When a bone is straightened without having to open the skin (incision), it is called a closed reduction.

### Surgical Treatment

Sometimes, the position of the bone is so much out of place that it cannot be corrected or kept corrected in a cast. This has the potential of interfering with the future functioning of the arm. In this case, surgery may be required.

Surgery typically involves making an incision to directly access the broken bones to improve alignment (open reduction). Depending on the fracture, there are a number of options for holding the bone in the correct position during the healing process:

- Cast
- Metal pins
- Plate and screws
- External fixator
- Or any combination of these techniques

### After the Treatment

After the bone is properly aligned a splint or cast may be placed on your arm. A splint is usually used for the first few days to allow for swelling. After the swelling goes down, a cast is usually added. Depending on the nature of the fracture, your doctor will closely monitor the healing by taking regular x-rays. The cast is typically removed after six weeks. At that point, physical therapy is often started to help improve the motion and function of the injured wrist.

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