

Distal Radius Fracture – After Surgery

Information for patients

You have fractured/ broken a bone close to the wrist known as the radius that has been surgically repaired also known as an Open Reduction Internal Fixation (ORIF).

Casting

Usually for 2 to 4 weeks but sometimes can be more or less.

Healing times

Approximately 6 to 8 weeks for your bone to heal and another six weeks for the bone to become almost as strong as it was before. More complex injuries can take longer to heal and it can take up to 12 months for normal hand use to return.

Hand use (see additional hand out for examples of activities)

- Week 1 to 6 after injury – light activities only with cast on and **AVOID** using the injured wrist
- Week 6 to 10 after injury – once cast removed, light to medium activities
- Driving: from 8+ weeks after injury when wrist movement and grip strength have improved. Your doctor can give formal advice.
- Week 10 to 12 after injury – medium to heavy activities
- Week 12 to 14 after injury – contact sports.

Common complications

- **Stiffness:** is normal once the cast is removed and can last up to 1 year and can be worse if there is a background of osteoarthritis and when it is cold.
- **Other soft tissue injuries:** structures that are not muscle or bone around your radius tend to contract causing stiffness. Common presentations are clicking, increased swelling, weakness, and lack of movement.
- **Numbness and pins and needles in fingers:** temporary or intermittent symptoms are normal during casting and initially once the cast is removed. These symptoms should resolve within a few weeks after cast removal – the exercises below and general hand use should help with resolving symptoms.
- **Scar tissue (under the skin):** tendon/ nerve tethering (sticking) to the scar tissue.
- **Tendon:** inflammation/ tightness.

Hand therapy advice

Pain

- Use over the counter painkillers regularly at the lowest dose e.g paracetamol and ibuprofen.
- Heat: warm water hand baths/ hot water bottle. Heat relaxes muscles, relieves muscle and joint stiffness and aches. Considering warming up joints before activity, making exercising easier.

Scar

- Once the scar has formed, massage to help it stop sticking to the metal plate.



Swelling

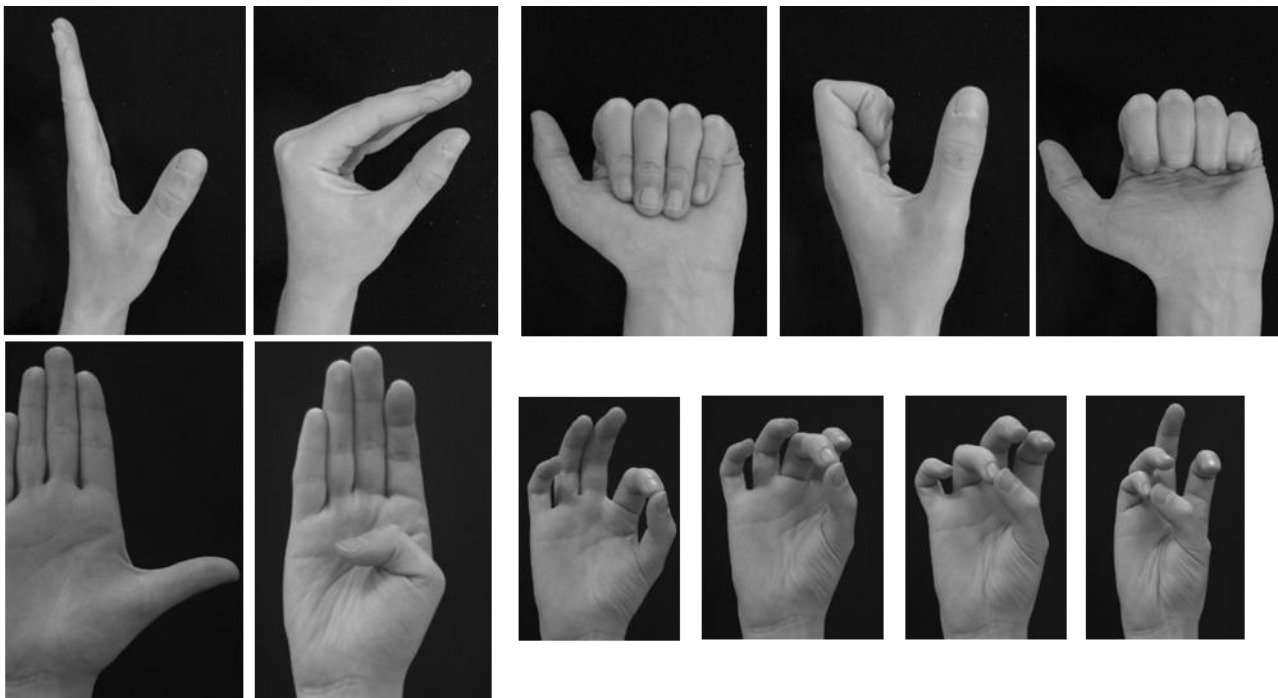
- Elevation, compression and movement.

Splint

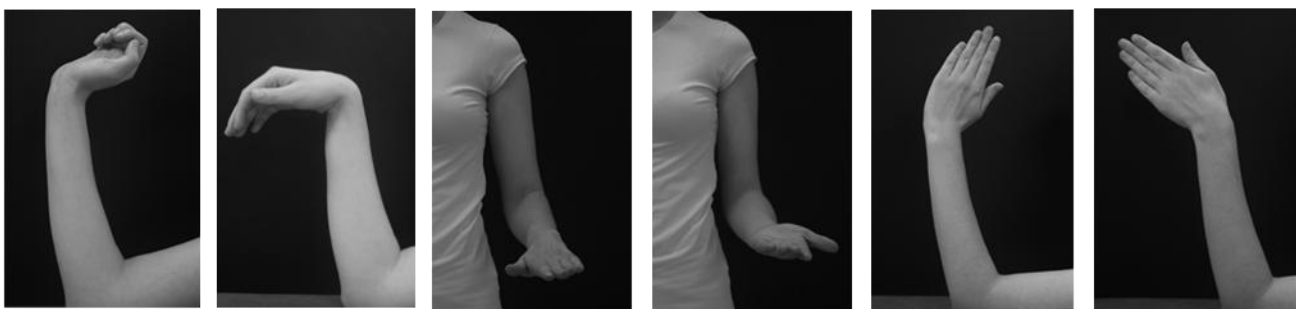
- Wrist support – worn intermittently up to 4 to 8 weeks once the cast has been removed for heavier tasks, periods of rest, not to be worn full time.

HOME EXERCISE PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Until the cast is removed – **10 repetitions, 4 to 5 times a day** – as guided by your hand therapist.



Once the cast is removed – as guided by your hand therapist.



Approximately 1 to 2 weeks after the cast is removed – as guided by your hand therapist.



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Tel: **020 3299 4618**

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