

# Scaphoid Fracture



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

The scaphoid bone is one of the 8 small bones of the wrist. It is located near the thumb.

A fracture, also called a broken bone, happens when there is force against the bone during a fall or accident.

If you have brittle bones from osteoporosis, you can be at greater risk for a fracture. A scaphoid fracture most often happens when you fall onto your outstretched hand.

## Signs

You may have one or more of these signs:

- Pain in the thumb side of the wrist that may ease after days or weeks
- Swelling in the hand or wrist
- Loss of strength in the hand and wrist

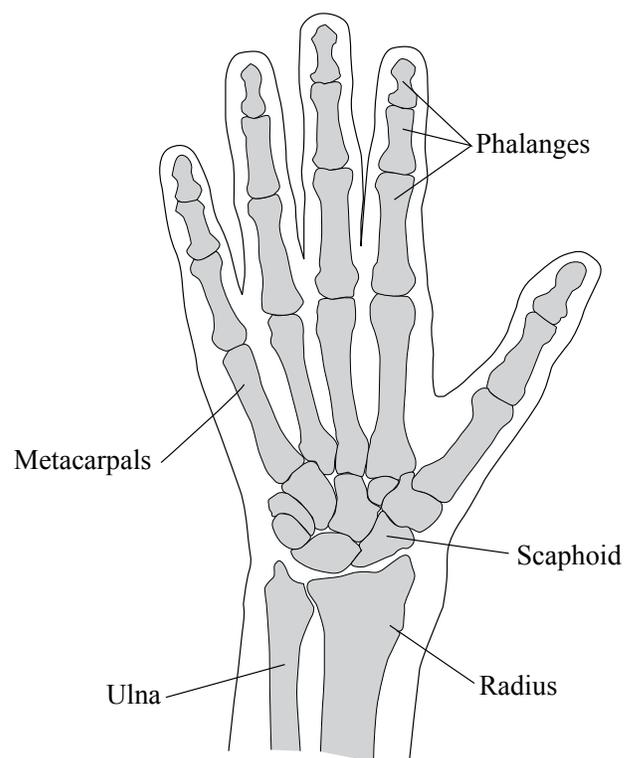
It is common for people with this fracture to think they have sprained their wrist. The person may not seek treatment and may not know that the bone was broken until weeks, months, or years later.

## Treatment

Your doctor will do an exam and x-rays will be done to see if there is a fracture. The fracture may not be seen on the first x-rays. If you have tenderness in the soft space on the thumb side of your wrist, your doctor may splint your hand and have you return in 2 weeks for more x-rays. More tests, such as a CT scan, bone scan, or MRI, may be done if the repeat x-rays do not show a fracture, but signs still indicate a problem.

For a simple fracture, a cast is used to protect the bone until it heals. The cast likely will cover the lower arm, hand, and thumb and may include the elbow. Some fractures may need surgery. Pins or screws may be used to hold the bone pieces together. In some cases a bone graft is needed to help healing.

Your hand surgeon will talk with you about the best treatment for your injury.



## Healing and recovery

This fracture is often hard to heal because of poor blood supply. There is a blood vessel that goes through part of the scaphoid bone. If the fracture happens there, it can damage the blood flow to the rest of the bone. This can slow healing and may even cause part of the bone to die. If part of the bone dies, parts of it may collapse and arthritis may develop.

- While the wrist fracture heals, keep your fingers moving to prevent stiffness unless your doctor told you to limit movement.
- Avoid smoking or use of any tobacco products. Tobacco use slows the blood supply to the bone and could slow or prevent bone healing. If you need help quitting tobacco, please talk to your doctor.

As healing occurs, your doctor or therapist will have you start other exercises to help improve the strength and use of your wrist. Follow your exercise program.

Recovery time will depend on the type of fracture and any other injuries. Healing may occur in 6 weeks or it may be slowed because of poor blood flow. Some people have stiffness or aching and arthritis may develop. In some cases, other treatment or reconstructive surgery may be needed.

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**Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.