



*Scaphoid fracture*

### Scaphoid Fractures

Scaphoid fractures are usually caused by a fall on an outstretched hand. This bone which is at the base of the thumb causes tenderness and pain at the wrist when it is injured. Movement such as dorsiflexion of the wrist make the symptoms worse so people find that they cannot do simple tasks such as push a door open or do a press up without pain. On examination, there is commonly tenderness around the anatomical snuff box which is the small depression on the radial side of the wrist. The fracture is usually investigated with x-rays but sometimes a fracture of this bone is difficult to diagnose and additional scans may be required. The standard treatment for a scaphoid fracture is for it to be immobilised. The bone does not have a good blood supply and is slower to heal than other bones, therefore it is usual to have the wrist immobilised for a period of up to eight weeks.

The majority of scaphoid fractures heal if they are immobilised properly. Up to 90% of fractures will heal satisfactorily if they are undisplaced. Having said that even patients who have an undisplaced fracture that heals well sometimes find that they have

permanent stiffness in the wrist. This may be due to the soft tissue injury that occurs at the same time that the bone is injured or as a result of stiffening of the tissues because of the period of immobilisation that is required.

Because of this particular problem with the scaphoid, there is a need for fixation of the fracture in certain situations. If the fracture is displaced, meaning that the fragments have moved apart, it can be appropriate to operate early rather than try treatment in plaster. Fractures that fail to unite in an appropriate time or are affected by avascular necrosis, where part of the bone loses its blood supply, can be treated with surgery as well. If you do require surgery this can often be performed as a day case procedure. Sometimes the scaphoid needs grafting with bone from the radius or the pelvis, which will encourage the fracture to heal. If a fracture heals well it usually does not cause much trouble but people often say that they cannot bend the wrist back fully after having had this injury.

If there is irregularity of the fracture when it has healed or the part of the bone that has a poor blood supply dies back then it is possible to get osteoarthritis in the wrist several years after the event. It is therefore important that these are treated carefully and appropriately from the outset.

**Mr Paul Davey Orthopaedic Hand & Wrist Surgeon**

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