

Distal Radius Fracture

“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

Marybeth Ezaki, MD, Past President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand

What is a distal radius fracture?

The radius is one of the forearm bones that connects the elbow to the wrist. A distal radius fracture is a break in this bone just before the wrist joint. The radius is the most frequently broken bone in the arm. A distal radius fracture is considered simple if the bone breaks in only one place. A complex distal

Distal
Radius
Fracture



radius fracture occurs if the bone shatters into many pieces, if any other bones break along with the radius or if parts of the bone move out of their normal position.

What are the symptoms of a distal radius fracture?

A fractured distal radius may cause pain, swelling, bruising and tenderness, and, in some cases, the wrist may look abnormal. Other symptoms can include numbness and tingling in the fingers, or the inability to bend or straighten the fingers or thumb.

What causes a distal radius fracture?

A distal radius fracture is usually caused by a fall on an outstretched hand or through contact sports and physical activities. Bones make up our rigid skeleton, and when a lot of force is put through them, they can break. A number of risk factors, such as low bone density or osteoporosis, may make it more likely for a distal radius fracture to occur.



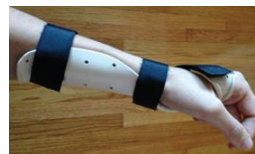
Example of a fall on an outstretched hand or wrist called a FOOSH

What is the treatment for a distal radius fracture?

If a doctor suspects that the radius is fractured, an X-ray of the forearm and wrist will be taken. Once a doctor determines there is a fracture of the distal radius, a decision will be made regarding how to treat the break. Which option a doctor picks will depend on whether the break is simple or complex. Some fractures will require simple immobilization in a cast. Others may require surgery to realign the bone.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist works directly with a doctor to discuss how the bone is healing and when to begin moving the wrist. A therapist will educate and instruct the patient on how to reduce swelling and pain, as well as give helpful tips on how to return to daily activities while the fracture heals. For protection, the therapist might also make an orthosis to help support the wrist. When a doctor and therapist decide it is safe, exercises that will help move and strengthen the fingers, wrist and forearm will be started. The therapist's goal will be to restore normal function and use of the hand and arm.



Example of wrist orthosis

To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit the American Society of Hand Therapists at www.asht.org or call 856-380-6856.