

Distal Radius Fracture Fixation — Pre-Operative Patient Guide

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Distal Radius Fracture (Broken Wrist) — Open Reduction and Internal Fixation (ORIF)

Your Condition & Procedure

The condition

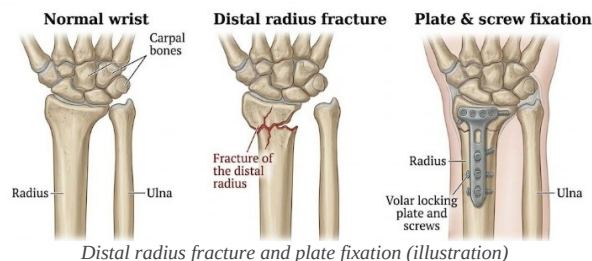
The **radius** is the larger forearm bone, and its end near the wrist forms most of the wrist joint. A **distal radius fracture** is a break in this area, often from a fall on an outstretched hand. If the bone is out of place, unstable, or broken into the joint, it can heal crooked and cause pain, stiffness, weakness, and arthritis.

The surgery

Open reduction and internal fixation (ORIF) is a typically outpatient surgery done through an incision, usually on the palm side of the wrist. The broken pieces are put back in place and held with a small metal plate and screws. Depending on what is found, additional pins or screws may be used. The final plan is determined during surgery.

Risks & benefits

Benefits: Restoring alignment gives you the best chance of regaining wrist motion, strength, and function. **Risks** are uncommon and include infection, blood clots, delayed or failed bone healing, loss of alignment, hardware or tendon irritation that may require hardware removal (rarely tendon rupture), finger numbness or tingling, complex regional pain syndrome (excessive pain and swelling), injury to nearby structures (such as nerves, blood vessels, or cartilage), stiffness, persistent pain, and the need for further surgery. These will be reviewed with you in detail before surgery.



Distal radius fracture and plate fixation (illustration)

Before Surgery

- **Medications:** We will tell you what to stop and when (e.g., blood thinners, anti-inflammatories, some supplements, weight-loss injections).
- **Fasting:** Follow the instructions from your surgery coordinator/facility.
- **Nicotine:** Stop all nicotine products—they slow healing.
- **Equipment:** A splint is placed at surgery; a brace follows.
- **Physical therapy:** Schedule your first visit for about 2 weeks after surgery, when your splint is typically removed.
- **Home:** Plan for a helper and one-handed tasks at first.
- **Medical history:** Let us know if you or anyone in your family has a history of blood clot disorders or a malignant hyperthermia reaction to anesthesia.
- **Health:** Call us if you develop a fever, illness, or skin problem near the wrist.

Day of Surgery

- If instructed, take blood pressure/heart medications with a small sip of water.
- Arrive at the time given by your surgery coordinator.
- Bring your medication list, insurance card, photo ID, and any splint or sling you were given.
- Wear a loose, button-front shirt; leave jewelry and valuables at home.
- A responsible adult must drive you home. You may **not** drive yourself.

Immediately After Surgery

- You will recover in the recovery area; most patients go home the same day.
- Your surgeon will discuss the procedure with you and your support person.
- Your care team will review wound care, restrictions, medications, follow-up, and warning signs before discharge.

Milestone	What to Expect After Surgery (General Timeline)
Splint & brace	Splint for about 2 weeks, then a removable brace until about 6 weeks. Finger motion right away; wrist motion at about 2 weeks.
Daily life	Light hand use (about 1–2 lb, like a coffee cup) from about 2 weeks; most daily activities and light work by about 6–12 weeks. No driving while taking narcotic pain medication.
Bone healing	Healing is typically confirmed on X-ray around 6 weeks. Strengthening and gradual weight-bearing through the wrist follow (about 10–12 weeks if the break extends into the joint).
Activity	Non-impact sports after about 3 months; contact sports typically 3–4 months, after strength testing and surgeon clearance.
► Please note: This is a general guide only. Detailed post-operative instructions will be provided on the day of surgery, and your restrictions and timeline may change based on the findings and procedures performed.	

Learn More

We **strongly recommend** reading these pages from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (OrthoInfo) before your surgery:

- **Your condition: Distal Radius Fractures (Broken Wrist)** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/diseases--conditions/distal-radius-fractures-broken-wrist/>
- **Your procedure: Internal Fixation for Fractures** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/treatment/internal-fixation-for-fractures/>

Video: You may find a video demonstrating an example (not the exact technique) of your surgery at

<https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/page/1779814-wrist-fractures-distal-radius-fracture-repair-with-volar-plate-animation> (or browse <https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/catalog>).