

# Fifth metacarpal neck fracture

Your Emergency Department doctor has referred you to the Virtual Fracture Clinic. This allows fast access to a specialist opinion without having to visit the hospital in person.

An orthopaedic doctor will review your case, then a physiotherapist will contact you by telephone to discuss your management plan.

## Your diagnosis is fifth metacarpal neck fracture



You have sustained a fracture of the knuckle of your little finger.

This is a very common fracture and generally heals very well.

Fifth metacarpal fractures are managed with buddy-strapping or an ulnar gutter cast for 4 weeks.



The options for non-surgical management are usually to:

1. 'Buddy strap' the finger to a neighbouring finger for two to four weeks and move it as pain allows.
2. Support the finger in a plastic splint and then move the finger as pain allows.

The pain, tenderness and swelling you are experiencing in your hand will settle within the first couple of weeks.

The strapping can be removed after three weeks, as pain allows.

It is important that you start gentle movement early and that you try to use the finger for light activities. You should expect to start trying to move the finger within 48 hours of the injury, exercises to help you do this are outlined below.

## Early Management: the first three days after the injury

It is normal for your hand to become bruised and swollen. This will settle over a few weeks. The following guidelines can help to minimise swelling and pain:

### Rest

For the first few days and avoid any activity that increases your pain.

### Ice

Ice the finger for **20 minutes every 1-2 hours**. Use an ice pack or a bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in wet tea-towel. Continue this for **3 to 7 days** after your injury.

### Elevate

Rest hand above elbow position for first 1 to 2 **weeks** to minimise swelling.

## Lifting

For the first **6 weeks** you should not lift objects heavier than the weight of a cup of tea or mobile phone (**250 grams**).

## Rehabilitation next six weeks

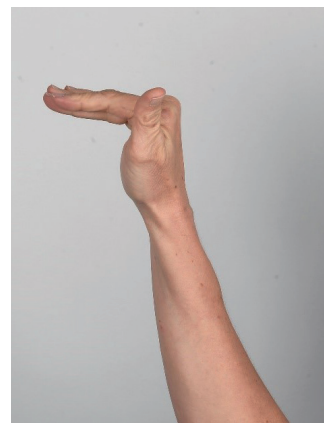
You should try to use your hand as normally as possible within the strapping or splint, but you should avoid any heavy lifting, pulling or pushing for the first six weeks after your injury.

You should try to move your fingers, opening and closing your hand in a fist, as much as you can. This will help with the tissue healing and prevent the finger from becoming stiff.

You should also make sure to maintain the normal movement in all the other joints of your hand and upper limb by moving them regularly.

## What exercises should I do?

To avoid stiffness and to optimise the return of movement in your hand, perform the exercises below five to ten times, four times each day.



It is normal for these exercises to feel uncomfortable when the fingers are stiff. If they become too easy you can stop doing them.

## Medication

Simple medication such as paracetamol or anti-inflammatories may help to control your pain. Speak with your local doctor (GP) or pharmacist about your medication options.

## Smoking

Research shows that smoking increases the risk of poor healing in fractures. Stopping smoking will improve the chance of a good outcome. For further information on quitting smoking visit [www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au) or speak with your GP.

## Physiotherapy

If you are struggling to get your movement back at 12 weeks, please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic to discuss your options.

## Expected return to daily activities

This fracture usually takes six weeks to heal and you will need to avoid heavy lifting for up to eight weeks so it can heal properly.

As your bone heals, a lump may form at the break site and your knuckle may not be as prominent as before your break.

You can return to your normal duties when you are able to make a full fist and fully straighten your fingers without any pain.

## Driving

Check with your insurer about driving with a finger splint or strapping.

## Return to work

The amount of time you will need off work relates to the severity of your injury and your work requirements. Discuss your return to work plan with your local doctor and employer.

As a guide:

- Manual workers - If you need to climb ladders or do repetitive lifting it may take **6 to 8 weeks** to return to normal duties.
- Desk workers - you can return as soon as your pain allows.

## Return to sport

It is recommended that you see a physiotherapist for a guided return to sport program. You should avoid contact sports and heavy manual work for 8 to 12 weeks.

## Longer-term recovery and expectations

Most fractures heal without any problems in about eight weeks. However, it may take several months for your symptoms to settle completely. These can include pain or discomfort, stiffness, decreased strength and swelling. Some people may notice a bump on the back of the hand where the fracture occurred, but this shouldn't affect hand function. The bones may take longer to heal if you suffer from diabetes or if you smoke.

## When to contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic

- If you have not heard from us within three working days after your Emergency Department visit.
- If your pain is so bad that medication and RICE (rest, ice, compression and elevation) do not help.
- If you notice increasing pain without a cause after it was improving.
- If you notice major numbness, pins and needles, or changes in circulation in your arm, hand or fingers.
- If your symptoms are still bad after 6 weeks.

**If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic:**

**T: 0448 193 644**

**E: [myfracture@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:myfracture@health.qld.gov.au)**

This fact sheet provides some information to assist with management and rehabilitation of your injury. While it contains the recommended information, it does not contain all available information about your injury and is not a substitute for specific advice from the Virtual Fracture Clinic in respect of your injury.

All treatment options have risks and benefits. This advice is of a general nature and is appropriate for most patients with this condition. However, it may not apply to your specific injury and circumstances.

If you have any concerns about progress of your rehabilitation, contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic promptly.

Do not continue the exercises in the brochure if:

- You experience increasing pain that does not settle quickly with rest (some discomfort is common)
- Your condition has deteriorated in any way since you last consulted the Virtual Fracture Clinic
- You have a new injury or condition and have not consulted the Virtual Fracture Clinic about it.

This information is only designed for patients who are currently being treated by the Virtual Fracture Clinic at the Townsville University Hospital. If you do not understand the information seek clarification from the Virtual Fracture Clinic.

Patients should be aware that the suggested management is not guaranteed to provide any improvement in your condition.

Keep this brochure as you may need to read it again. Thank you to the Royal Melbourne Hospital VFC for their assistance.



Partnering with Consumers - This patient information brochure supports National Safety and Quality Health Service Standard 2. Consumers and/or carers provided feedback on this patient information.



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