

Greenwich Hospital

What is an O.R.I.F. of the Wrist?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is an O.R.I.F. of the Wrist?

O.R.I.F. is the abbreviation for open reduction internal fixation. This is a surgical procedure used to repair a broken or fractured bone, such as one of the bones in the wrist. It may also involve use of plates and screws or rods/pins to stabilize the bone that is broken.

If you are having an O.R.I.F. performed to repair a broken bone, you will be taken to the operating room, given anesthesia so that you will not feel the surgery, and an orthopedic surgeon will perform the procedure.

Why did my wrist break?

A broken wrist, or wrist fracture, often occurs during a fall or injury. This happens because those who fall have a tendency to stretch out their arms and hands to stop the fall, landing on the hands and injuring the wrist.

Also, a break of the wrist with a minor fall can be an early sign of osteoporosis, or brittle bones. Your orthopedic surgeon will discuss this with you if you are considered at risk.

What are the symptoms of a broken bone?

- Pain and tenderness of the arm, wrist, and/or hand
- Inability to grip with hand and/or move the wrist
- Swelling
- Bruising

What happens during the O.R.I.F.?

- The surgeon will make an incision in the wrist area
- The surgeon may need to move pieces of bone back into the correct positions, this is called reduction.
- When the broken bone is back in place, the surgeon stabilizes the arm. This may require plates or pins to be put in place.
- The arm and wrist may then be immobilized with a cast or splint.

Is there any special care of the arm/wrist after surgery?

Swelling of your arm or hand may occur within the first 24 to 72 hours after the fracture and surgery. This can make the cast/splint feel very snug or tight. To reduce swelling:

- A sling may be ordered to help keep the arm elevated.

- Elevate your arm above your heart by propping it up on pillows or some other soft support, such as the arm of a chair padded with a pillow or cushion. This will also help to reduce pain.
- Gently move your fingers around often.
- Apply ice to the cast/splint. Put the ice in a plastic bag or use an ice pack to prevent the cast/splint from getting wet.
- Do not allow your arm to hang down by your side when standing/walking. Keep your hand and wrist elevated at or above heart level.

Is there any special care of the cast/splint?

- Keep the cast/splint dry. Moisture weakens plaster, and damp padding next to the skin will cause an irritation. Check with your surgeon before showering or taking a tub bath after surgery.
- Keep dirt, sand, and powders away from the cast/splint.
- Do not pull out the padding from your cast/splint. The padding helps to protect your skin.
- Do not stick any objects down the cast/splint for any reason, such as itching.
- Do not break off any rough edges or trim the cast/splint before asking your surgeon.
- Check the skin around the cast and the hand and fingers frequently throughout the day. Report raw or irritated skin, excessive swelling of the hand or fingers, or a change in color of your skin around the cast/splint or on the hand/fingers.

Are there any complications after surgery that I should report to my surgeon?

Though uncommon, infection can occur at the surgical site and this must be reported to the surgeon. Symptoms include:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ○ Fever of 100 degrees F or more | ○ Increased pain |
| ○ Drainage and/or foul odor from under the cast/splint | ○ Skin around the incision is warm to touch |

Other symptoms to report to the surgeon include:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| ○ Swelling and/or tightness of the cast that is not relieved with elevation | ○ Fingers are dusky or blue in color |
| ○ Fingers are cool to touch | ○ Tingling or numbness of fingers |

Source: American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. Retrieved June 2005 from <http://orthoinfo.aaos.org>

For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education 6/05