Sussex Hand Surgery

CONDITION
Hand Fractures (broken bones)

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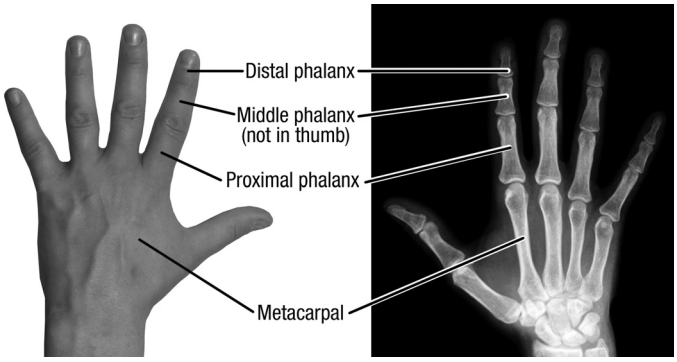
What are Hand Fractures (broken bones)?

There are many small bones in the hand. The pictures below show the bones on an xray and a hand for clarity. The arrangement is similar for each finger and the thumb although you will notice there is one less bone in the thumb.



Normal Hand to show different bones

Which bones are commonly broken in the hand?

There are many small bones in the hand. Any of these bones can be broken. The break might be described as 'intra-articular' (involving the smooth joint surface) or 'extra-articular' (not involving the joint). They can be displaced (out of the normal position) or undisplaced (well lined up). Sometimes you might hear them described as 'comminuted'. This means the fracture is in several pieces.

How do I know I have broken my hand, not just sprained it?

A displaced fracture may be very obvious with deformity, swelling, bruising and pain. Undisplaced fractures can be quite difficult to pick up without xrays. If in doubt obtain expert advice early on to make sure you are put on the path to recovery as quickly as possible.

How is the diagnosis made?

Xrays usually confirm the diagnosis; more detailed scans are not usually required in the hand.

What treatments are available for hand fractures?

All hand fractures are helped by elevation of the limb (to get the swelling down) and painkillers. Application of ice packs can sometimes also help.

Many hand fractures can be treated without an operation but good advice regarding appropriate support and exercises to regain maximum function as quickly as possible is important.

Some fractures in the hand do not do well without intervention. Generally these are ones that involve the joints and those that are very badly displaced (out of their normal position). In this case the simplest surgery is 'manipulation under anaesthesia' (MUA). This involves moving the broken bones about to try and realign them. The new position might be supported with tape between the fingers, a splint or small wires through the skin into the bone (K wires). If a simple manipulation is not enough your surgeon might suggest an 'open reduction and internal fixation' (ORIF). This involves opening the skin and tissues around the bone and putting the bone bits back together, like a jigsaw puzzle. After this the bone fragments are often held with small plates and screws inside the finger, on the bone but sometimes K wires are used along with a plaster or splint. After all these operations the finger will be stiff and it is vital that you do regular exercises to regain maximum function as quickly as possible. Your surgeon will advise you regarding this.