

Boxer's fracture (5th metacarpal fracture)

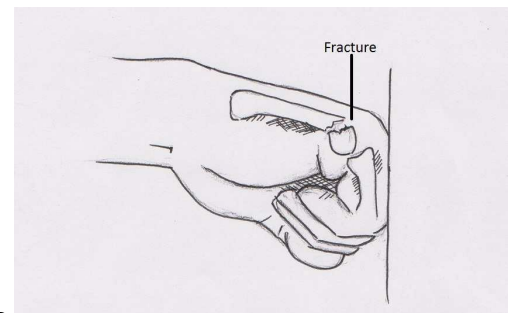
This leaflet offers more information for patients with a 5th metacarpal fracture (boxer's fracture) that is managed conservatively (without surgery). If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is a boxer's fracture?

Your thumb and fingers are connected to the wrist by bones called metacarpals. Each of the five metacarpals has a head, neck, shaft and base.

The 5th metacarpal is the long bone in the hand under the little finger. The head of the metacarpal forms the large knuckle at the base of the little finger, with the neck sitting just underneath the head.

The 5th metacarpal can be fractured (broken) during falls, sports, road traffic accidents or violence. A fracture to the neck of the 5th metacarpal bone is also known as a **boxer's fracture**, as it is often seen following a punch injury.



What are the symptoms?

Pain, swelling and bruising are very common following a metacarpal fracture. There may also be small abrasions (grazes) over the knuckles. If the injury was sustained by punching another person in the mouth, there may be puncture wounds from the other person's teeth, known as a **fight bite**. This can be serious and lead to infection, so if you think you may have a fight-bite you must let your surgeon or nurse practitioner know.

You may feel that moving your wrist or fingers, or both, is painful. You may notice some changes in the appearance of your hand and there may be a small bump on the back of your hand which indicates that the position of the bone has changed.

The position of the little finger can also change after a boxer's fracture, causing it to become twisted (rotated) or to tuck under/over the adjacent finger when making a fist (scissoring).

How is a boxer's fracture diagnosed?

A doctor, nurse practitioner or hand therapist will take your history and then perform an examination of your hand. An x-ray will be taken to review the fracture and look for any significant movement at the fracture site (angulation). No other tests are normally required.

How is a boxer's fracture treated?

Most people do not need surgery for this type of injury and recover well following a boxer's fracture. The knuckle often remains dropped and there may be a bony bump on the back of the hand. However, this will not impact on hand function. The following information will help you to manage your injury and recovery over the coming weeks.

Strapping/Splinting

For a short period after the injury, it may be recommended that the little finger is buddy-strapped to the ring finger for support while still allowing the fingers to bend and straighten. This helps the hand to recover more quickly and prevents stiffness. You should wear this strapping as much as possible for the first two-three weeks following injury, after which time you can remove it and try to use your hand as normally as possible.

If you are provided with any other splints or braces, please wear these as instructed by the clinician that saw you.

Swelling

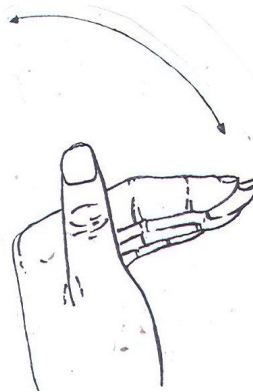
Swelling (oedema) is the body's natural response to injury. It is important to minimise swelling, as this will optimise your healing and movement. Swelling can take a number of months to fully resolve. You can help decrease swelling by lifting your hand above the level of your heart as much as possible when you are resting.

Exercise

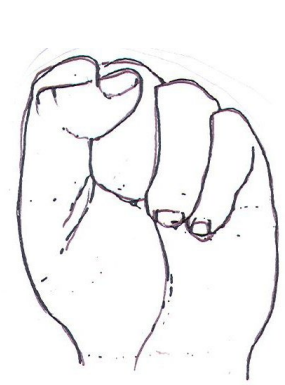
Sometimes the affected finger or area will feel stiff after a fracture. You may be given hand exercises to help with this. Please follow the exercise information that has been provided. Only do the exercises prescribed and do not over exercise.



Keep the main knuckles of your fingers straight; bend the top and middle joints of each finger together. Bring your fingers back up to straight.



Aim to make the best fist you can with your fingers; bring your fingers back to straight.



Keeping your fingers together bend the main knuckles, keeping the top and middle joints straight. Bring your fingers back up to straight.

- Try to do each movement 5 times and hold for 5 seconds
- Move slowly and gently and do not force your fingers
- Try to do these exercises 3 times a day

Return to work, sport and activities

Boxer's fractures normally take six to eight weeks to heal and another four to six weeks to get back to full strength. It is normal for your hand to ache in cold weather or if you accidentally knock it. This may be the case for up to six months following your injury.

You should avoid carrying and lifting heavy objects for at least six weeks and should avoid all sport for at least eight weeks after a fracture. For contact sports such as rugby or intensive activities such as rock climbing or windsurfing, you should wait up to 12 weeks after injury before re-commencing these types of activities.

You can decide when to drive again. However, you should feel confident you can control your car safely in case of an emergency. Usually, this is between 4 and 6 weeks after injury.

Your return to work depends on the type of work you do and how flexible your job or employer are. If you need a fit note (Statement of Fitness to Work) this can be provided by the doctors, nurse practitioner, hand therapist or your GP.

What can I expect from my recovery?

Most people tend to underestimate the impact of hand fractures on day-to-day life and the time it can take for the signs and symptoms to resolve completely. However, most fractures will heal without the need for intensive treatment, and, in most cases, you can continue to manage your recovery following the advice provided in this leaflet without the need for additional treatment.

Pain should improve on a weekly basis and may be present when using the hand for up to 12 weeks post injury. Some people experience occasional pain for up to a year, but this is rare and tends to be associated with heavier activities or colder temperatures.

Often the little finger will struggle to fully straighten for the first few weeks after an injury, although this normally resolves in time. By three-four months after the injury most patients will have regained near full range of motion and strength and will not experience significant issues in their day-to-day life.

Longer-term, the shape and size of the finger may appear different. If your metacarpal has lost length your joint (knuckle) may appear shorter or less prominent when making a fist. This will not change with time. You may also feel or see a lump at the back of your hand; this tends to improve with time but can take at least 12 months to get smaller.

Who can I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or concerns, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse practitioner or hand therapist at your clinic appointment.

Alternatively, you can contact the hand unit on **020 8725 4770** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm).

For urgent advice outside of these hours, please contact the on-call plastic surgeon by calling the switchboard on **020 8672 1255** and asking for bleep number **7050**.

If you are still having difficulties with movement or pain beyond six weeks OR if you sustain an injury to

the same finger, please contact the hand unit on the above number to arrange further follow-up.

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

Tel: 020 8725 2453 Email: pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. Tel: 111

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