



## Ask the Expert with Dr. Darrell Menard

Find Answers to your Sport Medicine Questions!

### Scaphoid Fractures?

**Q:** Last week, I was tripped playing soccer and landed hard on an outstretched right arm. My wrist was very sore after the fall but x-rays done after the game showed nothing was broken. Despite this, the physician's assistant said I might have a scaphoid fracture and put me in a cast for 2 weeks. What is a scaphoid fracture and why was I casted? Frank

**A:** Dear Frank: Sorry about your injury. The scaphoid is a cashew shaped bone found on the thumb side of the wrist. It plays an important role in wrist movement and stability and it is the most frequently fractured wrist bone. Scaphoids are most commonly injured by falling on an outstretched hand which can subject the bone to enough pressure to crack it.

People with scaphoid fractures often present with pain, swelling, and tenderness to touch over the thumb side of their wrist. They also have pain moving their wrist in certain directions and when they try to push off a surface using their injured wrist. Unfortunately, these same symptoms can occur with wrist sprains so x-rays are often ordered to rule out a fracture. The challenge with diagnosing scaphoid fractures is that the fracture lines are often so small they simply cannot be seen on plain x-rays, and may not be seen early on after the injury. Unfortunately, when no fracture is seen, people are often assumed to have a sprained wrist and are sent home in a supportive wrap.

Proper management of someone with the above symptoms and a negative x-ray is to assume they have a scaphoid fracture and put them in a cast for 2 weeks. After 2 weeks, the patient returns for a second set of x-rays. If the new x-ray shows a scaphoid fracture, the person is placed in a cast for 6 or more weeks. If the x-ray is normal but the person is still tender to pressure over the thumb side of their wrist, they are also assumed to have a scaphoid fracture and casted for 6 or more weeks.

Why all the fuss over scaphoid fractures? The possibility of a scaphoid fracture should never be taken lightly because these fractures are often associated with serious complications such as delayed healing, nonunion, bone death, arthritis, decreased range of motion and reduced grip strength. Some of these complications are the result of damage with the fracture to the scaphoid's blood supply. Some of these complications will require surgery and all of them can have significant long- term negative impacts on the quality of people's lives.

The bottom line: Scaphoid fractures are serious injuries that require good medical management by your health care professional. This injury requires a lot of time to heal properly and while this is occurring it is best to stay active doing things that don't bother your wrist.

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Dr. Darrell Menard is the Surgeon General's specialist advisor in sport medicine. He has worked extensively with athletes from multiple sports and has covered Canadian teams competing at multiple games including the 2012 Olympics and the 2016 Paralympic games. These articles were originally published in the Canadian Forces Journal, the Maple Leaf.

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