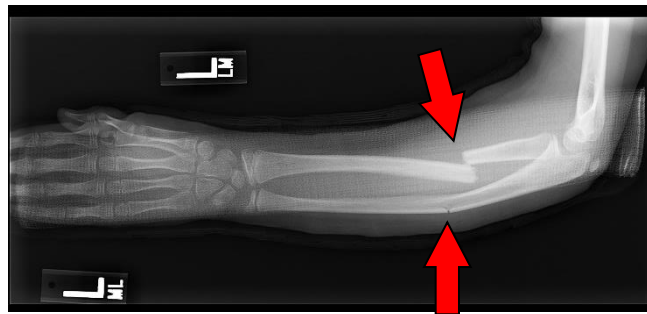


STEVEN CHUDIK MD

SHOULDER, KNEE & SPORTS MEDICINE

Forearm Fracture

A forearm fracture is a complete or incomplete break of one or both the radius and ulna bones of the forearm, which extend from the elbow to the wrist.



Frequent Signs and Symptoms

- Severe forearm pain at the time of injury
- Tenderness, swelling, and later bruising of the forearm, with the swelling and bruising later moving to the wrist and hand
- Visible deformity if the fracture is complete and bone fragments separate (are displaced) enough to distort normal body contours
- Numbness, coldness, or paralysis below the fracture involving the forearm or hand from pressure on or stretching of blood vessels or nerves (uncommon)

Etiology (Causes)

- Direct blow or force to the forearm bone
- Indirect stress due to falling on an outstretched hand, twisting injury, or violent muscle contraction

Risk Factors

- Contact sports, such as football, rugby, soccer, martial arts, and hockey
- History of bone or joint disease (such as osteoporosis)
- Previous immobilization of the forearm
- Poor physical conditioning (strength and flexibility)

Prevention

- Appropriately warm up and stretch before practice or competition.
- Maintain appropriate conditioning, including forearm strength, flexibility, and endurance.
- Wear proper protective equipment and ensure correct fit.



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Outcomes

With appropriate treatment and normal alignment of the bones, healing can be expected. Surgery may be needed to realign fractures that are displaced. Average healing time is 6 to 8 weeks in adults and 4 to 6 weeks in children. Recovery of strength and motion may require 3 to 4 months.

Potential Complications

- Nonunion (fracture does not heal)
- Malunion (heals in a bad position)
- Chronic pain, stiffness, loss of motion, or swelling of the elbow or wrist
- Excessive bleeding or swelling in the forearm causing pressure and injury to nerves and blood vessels
- Heterotopic ossification (calcification of the soft tissues)
- Injury to the nerves of the hand or wrist due to stretching from the fracture, causing numbness, weakness, or paralysis
- Shortening of the arm
- Loss of motion of the elbow, wrist, and forearm

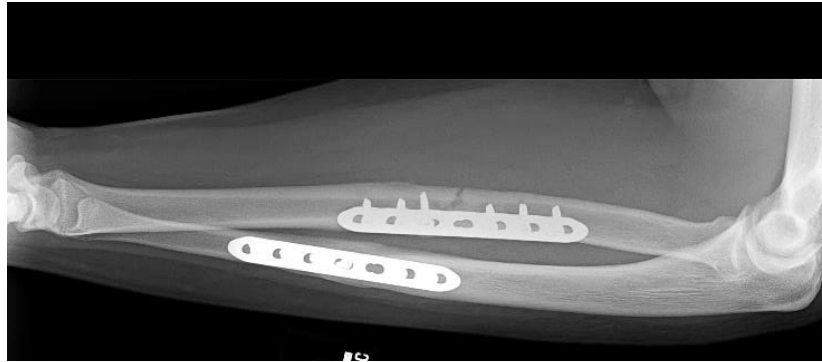
Treatment Considerations

If the bones are in appropriate alignment (position), the initial treatment consists of ice and medications to help relieve pain. Immobilization by splinting, casting, or bracing for 4 to 6 or more weeks is recommended to protect the bones while they heal. Severe fractures, fractures in which the skin over the bones is punctured, fractures that are displaced (not in appropriate alignment), and occasionally nondisplaced fractures may require surgery to restore and maintain the normal position of the bones. Surgery usually includes repositioning the bones and holding the position with rods, plates, screws, or pins (although in younger children, plates, screws, pins, and rods are seldom necessary). After immobilization (with or without surgery), stretching and strengthening of the injured and weakened joint and surrounding muscles (due to the injury and the immobilization) are necessary. These are usually done with the assistance of a physical therapist or athletic trainer. Plates and screws placed during surgery usually do not need to be removed.



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Post-operative x-ray of forearm following open reduction and internal fixation of radius and ulna

Possible Medications

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications, such as aspirin and ibuprofen (do not take within 7 days before surgery), or other minor pain relievers, such as acetaminophen, are often recommended. Take these as directed by your physician. Contact your physician immediately if any bleeding, stomach upset, or signs of an allergic reaction occur.
- Strong pain relievers may be prescribed as necessary. Use only as directed and only as much as you need.

Modalities (Cold Therapy)

Cold is used to relieve pain and reduce inflammation. Cold should be applied for 15 to 20 minutes every 2 to 3 hours for inflammation and pain and immediately after any activity that aggravates your symptoms. Use ice packs or an ice massage.

Notify My Office If

- Pain, tenderness, or swelling worsens despite treatment
- You experience pain, numbness, or coldness in the hand
- Blue, gray, or dusky color appears in the fingernails



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