Fracture of the Scaphoid. What?

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

The scaphoid bone which most patients have never heard of is one of the eight little carpal bones of the wrist. These carpal bones give great mobility to the wrist as they join the hand to the two forearm bones, the radius and the ulna.

Even though you have never heard of it, the scaphoid bone is the most commonly fractured carpal bone.

Who Is At Risk?

Young men are much more likely to have a scaphoid fracture. These fractures are not common in children and older adults. In these age groups the lower radius is a weak link. Why? Because in children there is a growth center at the wrist which is weaker than the bone itself and in older patients the radius at the wrist is often weakened by osteoporosis.

Why Is It A Problem?

Scaphoid fractures are important because their diagnosis is often delayed or missed completely. Patients are falling all the time and often don’t seek treatment because they think a sprain occurred and they expect to improve. When they don’t improve the patient often ignores wrist discomfort unless it is disabling.

Conversely, the injured patient goes to an Urgent Care or Emergency Room and the diagnosis is not made. Oops. Scaphoid fractures are notorious for not showing up on routine x-rays shortly after the injury. So the nurse at a busy ER wraps you in an ace bandage and out you go.

No One’s Fault

Scaphoid fractures can be missed by the patient and the ER personnel unfortunately. You can only hope that the injured patient will follow up with their Primary Care who will think that they could have a scaphoid injury and re-x-ray or refer.

Treatment

Scaphoid fractures that are not displaced more than 1mm are typically treated in a short arm cast which needs to cover the thumb also.

Because blood supply to the scaphoid is limited these fractures can heal slowly and occasionally they do not heal at all (non union). This can lead to bone graft surgery later.

A fracture that is separated (displaced) more than 1mm is frequently operated and a metal screw is inserted.

Fractures that can be managed in a cast alone can take way more than the typical 6 weeks depending on the individual situation.

Complications

Complications of a scaphoid fracture include non healing which has already been mentioned. Even if the bone heals it can undergo changes called avascular necrosis which leads to wrist arthritis, pain and stiffness.
Take Home Message

Scaphoid fractures are a very complicated subject. If the diagnosis in the Urgent Care or ER is a “sprain”, follow up with your Primary Care or Orthopaedic Surgeon for further evaluation which might include CT or MRI of the injured wrist. I would be happy to see you if you think you have a problem.

My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website

I hope what you have read has raised questions. No problem!

Please log onto www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It has a huge amount of musculoskeletal information in the Website and the Archive of all previous GCH articles.

Check it out and be amazed what you can learn.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you. Be well.

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