



January 2010

## Pain After Falling on an Outstretched Hand



**A**fter a fall on an outstretched hand, you should have an x-ray to check for a bone fracture, which could certainly account for lingering pain. Often, the bone affected is the navicular bone, also known as the scaphoid, located between the base of the thumb and the radius (one of the two long bones of the forearm). Because a navicular fracture often causes pain and swelling on the thumb side of the wrist, gripping motions can be particularly painful.

A fall on the hand can cause a fracture in the radius itself, especially in older people. Immediate pain, swelling and visible evidence, such as the wrist's angle, indicate that something is very wrong. The usual treatment for a small navicular fracture includes **casting, splinting** and **a rehabilitation program** that includes range-of-motion and strengthening exercises.

Because the blood supply, which carries oxygen and nutrients to the scaphoid bone, is poor, hand and wrist pain after a fall commonly lasts weeks, even several months. A rehabilitation program for a sprain may include

- **splinting during the day and/or night**
- **icing**
- **exercises to promote strength, flexibility and function**
- **nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory pain medication (NSAIDs) or cortisone injections** if your doctor approves

Rehabilitation is an important part of healing because of the long immobilization time needed to treat most scaphoid fractures. If you have fallen on an outstretched hand, we can design an individualized program to achieve the best chance of alleviating that nagging, lingering pain and help you regain full range of motion and strength in your hand and wrist.