Information for Patients
Undergoing Orthopaedic Trauma Surgery

Developed by the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery
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Introduction
This leaflet aims to help you understand important aspects of your treatment / surgery. It does not replace verbal communication so be sure to ask questions if there is something you don’t understand.

You are about to undergo surgery or have already had surgery. There are a few very important aspects about your injury or surgery that you need to be aware of.

Don’t worry when you read all of them as they may not all apply to you.

It is important that you are aware of possible complications that may occur so you will identify and act on them swiftly to ensure you have a successful outcome.

Have I a broken or a fractured bone?
The words “fracture” and a “broken bone” have the same meaning

How long will it take to heal?
Undergoing surgery to treat fractures only places the bones in the correct position for healing which means they are not completely “fixed” or “solid” until they heal in that position.

The healing time varies from patient to patient so don’t compare yourself to any other patients with similar injuries.

There is a lot you can do to help the healing process:

- Ensure you have a well balanced healthy diet
- Have more calcium and protein content in your meals
- STOP SMOKING. Smoking delays/prevent healing
- **Follow instructions given to you by the hospital staff involved in your care very carefully as they are all given to benefit you.**
- Attend all scheduled follow-up visits in the out-patients as these are important to monitor your progress
- If you are unsure about aspects of your care we always encourage you to ask questions.
Every patient will respond to the healing process differently. This is something that cannot be predicted. It is up to your own biology to assist the healing process.

Sometimes your fracture will be:
- Slow to heal
- May not heal at all
- Heal in an unsatisfactory position
- Sometimes the metal implants used to secure your bones together for healing may break.

If any of the above happens you may require further surgery.

Be reassured that the majority of fractures heal without any problems but as with most operations there are risks and complications.

**Why do I have to wait for my Surgery?**
Sometimes it is not always possible to have the surgery you need straight away. This may be because of swelling due to your injury. It takes time for this swelling to reduce and for the skin to be suitable for surgery.
If it is recommended that you will need to wait for swelling or skin to improve before your surgery we appreciate this can be frustrating for you. If you have surgery too soon, when the skin is damaged or swollen the risk of infection is greater, due to wound breakdown.

**Are there any other risks from my injury/surgery?**
When a bone breaks some other structures may also be damaged as a result of the injury. There are nerves, muscles, blood vessels, ligaments and tendons surrounding the majority of bones in the body. Your doctor will assess these structures when you arrive at the hospital.

There is a risk that some of these structures may also get damaged during your surgery. Every effort is made to prevent this from happening but some times it is unavoidable. If this happens your doctor will inform you and discuss the recovery time with you.
Many patients who fracture a bone may not be as active or mobile as they normally would be. This puts them at risk of developing a blood clot (DVT). If you have had a clot before or someone in your family has, you must inform your medical team.

You will receive medication to prevent clots while in hospital and you will also be fitted with white stockings or foot pumps.

There are some simple things you can do yourself to prevent clots:

- Drink plenty of fluids
- STOP SMOKING
- Do some ankle pumps while in bed *(ask your nurse to show you)*
- If you notice a lot of swelling in the limb where your fracture is it is important to elevate it above the level of your heart *(ask your nurse to show you if you are unsure.)*

**Will it hurt?**
You will experience some pain due to your injury/surgery. This will be assessed frequently with you by the nursing and medical teams. You may require pain killers for a short time but the majority of pain settles down after the surgery. Never be afraid to inform your nursing or medical team if you are in pain. Pain can sometimes be a sign of some other complications and it would be important to rule these out.

**Will my bone return to full strength?**
Once your fracture has healed you may experience stiffness. You may be sent for physiotherapy. It is extremely important that you follow advice and exercises that you are given to ensure a successful outcome.

Unfortunately with some complicated fractures you may be left with long term stiffness, this is difficult to predict and may take a long time to resolve or may never resolve.

Don’t be concerned after reading this information. The majority of fractures heal without complications, but it is important that you are aware of them so you understand the important role you play in your recovery.

If you have any questions after reading this information, we encourage you to ask questions about your care or surgery to any member of your health care team.