

## New procedure fixes broken wrist on the spot

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When it comes to repairing a fractured wrist bone, there are several avenues that can help you heal. But only one will grant you immediate use of that troubled wrist.

Although many wrist fractures are treated with a cast or a combination of cast and pins, such treatments can fail to maintain the bone alignment. By some estimates, 70 percent of patients experience pain and/or decreased wrist function because of alignment problems.

There's also the plates-and-screws method. This involves a fairly large incision, with a metal plate placed on the outer surface of the bone and screws locked in to hold the bone breaks together. But the introduction of such hardware opens the door to possible irritation to surrounding tendons and soft tissue, which can lead to swelling and a slower recovery — and maybe another operation to remove the bothersome implant.

Both methods can mean several uncomfortable weeks before wrist movement is regained.

So you're probably thinking, "Not tempting. What's that other option?"

For the past year, Dr. Samir Sodha of Crystal Run Healthcare in the Town of Wallkill has been performing repairs to the radius — that's the larger forearm bone on the thumb side — using an implant known as Micronail.

The wrist bone is made of several small bones and two forearm bones, known as the radius and ulna. The radius is the most commonly fractured, with more than 300,000 Americans breaking it annually — usually from trying to stop a fall. Women with osteoporosis are especially susceptible to such wrist injuries.

To repair the damage, Sodha, an orthopedic hand surgeon, makes an incision less than an inch long on the wrist. He moves the bone into its proper place, drills a small hole into the bone, then slides in the titanium alloy Micronail implant.

The implant — resembling a flat, curved pen and varying in size — stabilizes the bone and is left in permanently.

Several screws are locked into place to hold everything together and the patient is sewn up using dissolving stitches. Scarring is minimal.

The whole process takes about 45 minutes, Sodha says, and is done on an outpatient basis.

The advantage of this treatment option is that the implant remains entirely inside the bone, immediately giving the fracture stability, Sodha says, "so patients right away can move their wrist. And there's no hardware sticking out, so there's no risk of tissue damage."

With less surgical trauma, "the comfort level is much better than it is with the other options," he says. The only post-surgery restriction is no heavy lifting with that hand for four to six weeks.

But not everyone is a candidate. Certain fractures may be in too many pieces to use Micronail stabilization, Sodha says, or the patient might be too young — at a point when their bones are still growing. In these instances, one of the other treatment methods should be used.

As always, there are possible complications. These include infection, a continued problem with the fracture and stiffness.

Sodha estimates that he's done about 30 to 35 cases over the past year and that Micronail is a treatment option for up to 40 percent of his wrist fracture patients.