

First aid fact sheet

Fracture / dislocation



- It can be difficult to tell whether an injury is a fracture, dislocation, sprain or strain. If in doubt, always treat as a fracture.
- DO NOT try to force a broken or dislocated bone back into place.

Signs and symptoms

Fracture

- pain or tenderness at or near the site of the injury
- swelling
- deformity
- discolouration, redness, bruising
- loss of function
- the patient felt or heard the break occur
- a coarse grating sound is heard or felt as bones rub together

Dislocation

- pain at or near the site of the injury
- difficulty or inability to move the joint
- abnormal mobility of the limb
- loss of power
- deformity (such as an abnormal lump or depression)
- tenderness
- swelling
- discolouration and bruising

What to do

Fracture

- 1 Follow DRSABCD.
- 2 Ask the patient to remain as still as possible.
- 3 Control any bleeding, cover any wounds and check for other fractures.
- 4 Immobilise the broken bone by placing a padded splint along the injured limb.
- 5 Secure the splint by passing the bandages above and below the break to prevent movement. Tie the bandages firmly and away from the injured side.
- 6 For a leg fracture, also immobilise the foot and ankle. Support the limb while bandaging.
- 7 Check that the bandages are not too tight and watch for signs of loss of circulation to the limb every 15 minutes.
- 8 Seek medical aid.

Dislocation

- 1 Follow DRSABCD.
- 2 Rest and support the limb using soft padding and bandages.
 - For a **shoulder injury**, support the arm as comfortably as possible.
 - For a **wrist injury**, support the wrist in a sling.
- 3 Apply a cold pack directly over the injured joint, if possible.
- 4 Seek medical aid.
- 5 Check circulation of the limb. If circulation is absent, call **Triple Zero (000)** for an ambulance. Massage the limb gently to try to restore circulation.

In a medical emergency call Triple Zero (000)

DRSABCD Danger ► Response ► Send for help ► Airway ► Breathing ► CPR ► Defibrillation

You could save a life with first aid training • www.stjohn.org.au • **1300 360 455**

This information is not a substitute for first aid training. Formal instruction in resuscitation is essential. St John Ambulance Australia is not liable for any damages or incidents that may occur in the use of this information by other parties or individuals. This is not for commercial distribution. © St John Ambulance Australia 2022.