

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Functional outcome of Herbert screw fixation in scaphoid fracture

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Herbert screw fixation is a minimally invasive technique for treating scaphoid fractures, offering faster healing, reduced morbidity, and quicker recovery compared to traditional methods. It is ideal for active individuals, promoting early return to work and sports activities. **Material and Method:** Between 2023 and 2024, 30 patients (21 males, 9 females; mean age 28 years) underwent scaphoid fracture surgery. Most injuries were due to road traffic accidents. Right scaphoid fractures (18) were more common than left (12). Radiological evaluation included hand AP, oblique, and scaphoid stress views. Inclusion excluded complex or associated injuries. **Result:** In a study of 30 scaphoid fracture patients (28 followed), outcomes assessed via the modified Mayo wrist score showed excellent results (average score: 98). Radiologic union occurred in 27 cases, with functional recovery, grip strength, and minimal complications noted. Return to work ranged from 2-8 months, confirming effective treatment. **Conclusion:** Herbert screw fixation in scaphoid fractures demonstrates high efficacy, promoting stable union and early functional recovery. This minimally invasive technique offers reliable outcomes, reducing complications and facilitating quicker return to activities, making it a preferred choice for scaphoid management.

Key words: Herbert screw fixation, scaphoid fractures, functional recovery, radiological union, modified mayo wrist score

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INTRODUCTION**INTRODUCTION TO FRACTURE SCAPHOID**

The scaphoid is a small carpal bone located on the thumb side of the wrist, playing a critical role in wrist stability and motion. Fracture of the scaphoid is a common injury, often resulting from a fall onto an outstretched hand (FOOSH)¹. Due to its unique blood supply, which primarily enters the bone distally, scaphoid fractures are notorious for complications such as nonunion and avascular necrosis, particularly when the fracture occurs in the proximal region².

This injury predominantly affects young, active individuals, often linked to sports or high-energy trauma³. Diagnosing scaphoid fractures can be challenging due to the subtle nature of symptoms and the potential for normal initial X-rays. Delayed or missed diagnoses can significantly impact wrist function, leading to chronic pain, stiffness, and long-term disability⁴.

Effective management requires a comprehensive understanding of the fracture's location, displacement, and vascular status, typically achieved through

clinical evaluation and advanced imaging modalities such as MRI or CT scans⁵. Treatment options range from conservative management with immobilization to surgical intervention, depending on the fracture's characteristics. Early recognition and appropriate treatment are essential to optimize outcomes and prevent long-term complications⁶.

MODE OF TRAUMA

The scaphoid fracture is a common injury, particularly among young adults, and its mechanism typically involves the following modes of injury:

1. FALL ON AN OUTSTRETCHED HAND (FOOSH)

The most common mechanism of injury. The wrist is extended and radially deviated at the time of impact. The scaphoid, located on the radial side of the wrist, absorbs much of the force, leading to a fracture. Direct Trauma A direct blow or impact to the wrist or hand. Less common compared to FOOSH but possible in high-energy trauma like sports injuries or motor

vehicle accidents. Repetitive Stress or Overuse Rarely, repetitive stress activities⁶ (e.g., gymnastics or certain manual labor tasks) can lead to stress fractures of the scaphoid.

ANATOMY

The scaphoid is one of the carpal bones located in the wrist. It plays a crucial role in the stability and movement of the wrist joint. Shape of the scaphoid is boat-shaped, which is reflected in its name, derived from the Greek word "skaphos", meaning boat. It has a complex shape with concave and convex surfaces, making it prone to fractures. Articulations The scaphoid articulates with the following bones: Proximally: Radius Medially: Lunate Distally: Trapezium and trapezoid Laterally: Occasionally with the capitate The scaphoid facilitates wrist motion, including flexion, extension, and radial/ulnar deviation. It acts as a link between the proximal and distal rows of carpal bones, playing a key role in load transmission across the wrist. Fractures: Commonly occur at the waist of the scaphoid. These fractures can disrupt blood supply, leading to delayed healing or nonunion. Avascular Necrosis (AVN): Most often affects the proximal pole due to its limited blood supply. Tenderness in the Anatomical Snuffbox: Often indicates a scaphoid fracture.

PARTS OF SCAPHOID

The scaphoid, a small carpal bone located on the thumb side of the wrist, has several anatomical regions critical for its function and clinical significance. These regions include: Proximal Pole Located closer to the forearm. Articulates with the radius. Has limited vascular supply, making it prone to avascular necrosis in case of fractures. Distal Pole Located farther from the forearm, toward the hand. Articulates with the trapezium and trapezoid bones. Has a better blood supply compared to the proximal pole. Waist The narrowest part of the scaphoid, located between the proximal and distal poles. The most common site of scaphoid fractures. Tubercle A small projection on the palmar surface of the scaphoid near the distal pole. Serves as an attachment point for ligaments and contributes to the carpal tunnel structure. Each part of the scaphoid plays a vital role in wrist motion and stability, and fractures or injuries to specific areas can affect function and healing differently.

BLOOD SUPPLY OF SCAPHOID

The scaphoid bone, located in the wrist, has a unique blood supply that is crucial for its function and healing potential. Its vascularity is primarily derived from two sources:

1. DORSAL BRANCH OF THE RADIAL ARTERY: The majority of the blood supply to the scaphoid comes from branches of the radial artery. The dorsal carpal branch of the radial

artery enters the scaphoid through its dorsal surface, supplying about 70-80% of the bone, particularly the proximal pole.

2. PALMAR BRANCH OF THE RADIAL ARTERY: A smaller portion of the blood supply comes from the palmar carpal branch of the radial artery, which supplies the distal pole and some of the scaphoid's waist.

CLINICAL RELEVANCE

The retrograde blood flow from the dorsal branches is significant. This means blood flows from the distal to the proximal pole. The proximal pole is particularly susceptible to avascular necrosis (AVN) following fractures, as its blood supply is limited and depends heavily on retrograde flow. Fractures at the waist or proximal pole of the scaphoid are at higher risk of non-union or delayed healing due to compromised vascularity. Understanding this unique blood supply is critical for diagnosing and managing scaphoid fractures effectively.

WHY TO OPERATE SCAPHOID

Operating on a scaphoid is typically necessary in cases where the bone, located in the wrist, is fractured or injured and cannot heal properly without surgical intervention. Here are the main reasons for operating on the scaphoid: Poor Blood Supply the scaphoid has a limited blood supply, particularly to its proximal pole. This makes it prone to delayed healing (delayed union) or failure to heal (nonunion) if fractured. Surgery ensures stabilization and promotes blood flow to aid healing.

2. DISPLACED FRACTURE

If the bone fragments are misaligned (displaced), they need to be realigned (reduced) and stabilized with screws or pins. Surgery ensures precise alignment to restore wrist function. Nonunion or Malunion if a scaphoid fracture does not heal (nonunion) or heals improperly (malunion), surgery may be required to correct the issue. These conditions can lead to chronic pain, stiffness, and arthritis if left untreated. Avascular Necrosis (AVN) Poor blood supply to the scaphoid can result in the death of the bone tissue (AVN). Surgical intervention, such as a vascularized bone graft, can restore blood flow and save the bone. Chronic Pain or Instability Persistent pain, weakness, or instability in the wrist due to an untreated or improperly healed scaphoid fracture may necessitate surgery to improve function. Prevention of Long-Term Complications A poorly healed scaphoid fracture can lead to scaphoid non-union advanced collapse (SNAC) wrist, characterized by progressive arthritis. Surgery can help avoid or delay these complications.

Common Surgical Techniques:

- **INTERNAL FIXATION:** Using screws or pins to stabilize the bone.
- **BONE GRAFTING:** Transplanting bone tissue to stimulate healing.

- **ARTHROSCOPY:** Minimally invasive surgery to address complex fractures. Timely surgical intervention ensures proper healing, reduces complications, and restores wrist function and strength.

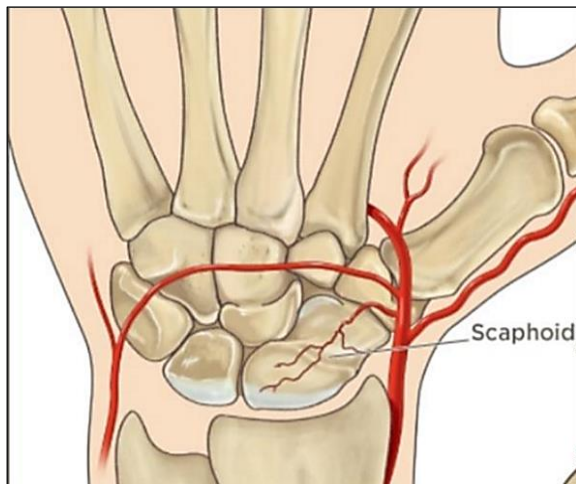


Fig 1: Blood Supply of Scaphoid



Fig 2: Parts of Scaphoid



Fig 3: X-rays of Herbert screw fixation in scaphoid

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Between 2023 to 2024, 30 Patients underwent operative procedure for fracture scaphoid in our department. 21 Male and 9 Female with mean age of 28 years (Range, 20-40 Years) of which 2 patients lost to follow up, with dominant hand 18 patients, non-dominant hand 10, were available for clinical and radiological assessment.

Involvement in road traffic accidents was the most common mode of injury followed by simple fall. The right scaphoid was injured in 18 patients and left scaphoid in 12 patients. Initial radiological investigation consisted of 3 views; Hand (AP and Oblique view) and scaphoid stress view. Acute

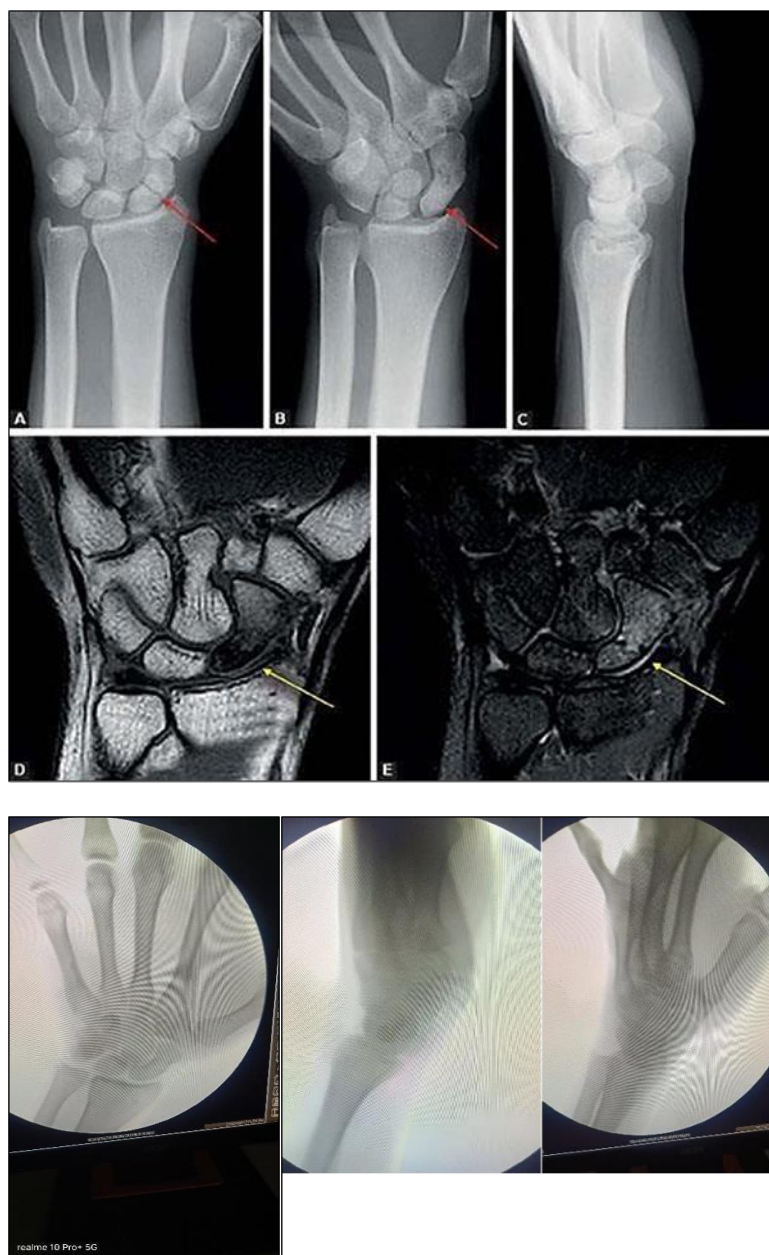
traumatic cases were taken with injury less than in a week.

INCLUSION CRITERIA

- Isolated scaphoid fractures.
- Age less than 50 years.
- Isolated scaphoid waist fractures.

EXCLUSION CRITERIA

- Age more than 50 years.
- Scaphoid fractures with perilunate fracture, scaphoid fractures with distal end radius.
- Scaphoid fractures with nerve injury, compartment syndrome.

PROCEDURE: PERCUTANEOUS HERBERT SCREW FIXATION FOR SCAPHOID FRACTURE**Fig 4: Fracture scaphoid****POSITIONING AND ANESTHESIA**

- The patient was positioned supine on the operating table.
- Under strict aseptic precautions and a brachial block, the procedure was performed.

PREOPERATIVE PLANNING AND MARKING

- Skin markings were made on the volar aspect of the wrist, aligned with the central axis of the scaphoid.
- In a mid-prone position, an additional marking was made on the dorsal aspect of the hand along the scaphoid's central axis.
- The intersection of these lines determined the entry point for the guidewire.

SURGICAL TECHNIQUE**1. INCISION AND EXPOSURE**

- A skin incision was made at the marked entry point.

2. REDUCTION MANEUVERS

- Hyperextension and ulnar deviation of the wrist, combined with thumb traction, facilitated fracture reduction.
- Ulnar deviation of the wrist also slid the scaphoid out from the radial styloid process. In this position, under image intensifier control, a 0.5-cm longitudinal incision was made at its most distal radial aspect.

- Blunt dissection was used to expose the distal pole of the scaphoid.

3. GUIDEWIRE PLACEMENT

- Under fluoroscopic guidance (IITV), a guidewire was inserted through the proximal pole of the scaphoid.
- A 1.1-mm percutaneous guidewire was introduced into the scaphoid, with great care taken to avoid bending the thin wire. It was directed in two views toward the center of the proximal pole of the fractured scaphoid and advanced until it arrived in an adequate position on both views.
- This required an appreciation of the 45° obliquity of the scaphoid in both anteroposterior and lateral planes. The guidewire track was angled 45° dorsally and 45° medially, along the mid-axis of the scaphoid.

4. DRILLING AND REDUCTION

- Drilling was performed over the guidewire.
- The length of the guidewire within the scaphoid was determined by a depth gauge. The drill was inserted using a guide to protect the soft tissues. Central screw placement is crucial because it is more biomechanically stable.
- Traction and manipulation ensured accurate fracture reduction.

5. FIXATION

- A Herbert screw was inserted to maintain alignment and stabilize the fracture.
- A self-tapping, 3-mm Herbert screw was introduced under intensifier control, and the guidewire was removed. Compression was confirmed by image intensifier.
- The end of the screw was buried beneath the distal surface of the scaphoid to avoid damage to the scaphotrapezial joint. A 20-mm screw was sufficient in almost all cases, with an 18-or 22-mm screw used in a few.

CLOSURE AND POSTOPERATIVE CARE

- The surgical site was irrigated with saline to ensure cleanliness.
- Skin closure was performed using appropriate sutures.
- The procedure was completed with intact distal neurovascular status confirmed.

INTRAOPERATIVE IMAGING

- Fluoroscopic imaging was used throughout the procedure to confirm the guidewire trajectory, reduction quality, and screw placement.

OUTCOME

- The fixation achieved stable alignment of the fracture, with no intraoperative complications.



Fig 5: Herbert screw fixation in scaphoid



Fig 6: Anatomical landmarks of scaphoid

POSTOPERATIVE CARE

A volar thumb slab splint was applied for approximately 2 weeks. Patients were advised to

elevate the operated-on limb during the first days postoperatively to control swelling. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and pain

medications were prescribed for postoperative swelling and pain control, respectively. The first postoperative follow-up visit occurred at 2 weeks. Active wrist range of motion was begun and was accompanied by hand grip exercises, provided no weight lifting occurred. After that, follow-up visits occurred every 4 weeks. At each follow-up visit, radiographs were obtained to assess fracture healing. The duration of follow-up depended on radiographic fracture healing and clinical evaluation.

RESULTS

A total of 30 patients were included in our study. Among these, 2 patients were lost to follow-up, reducing the final study population to 28 patients. The study utilized the modified Mayo wrist score to evaluate outcomes, providing a comprehensive assessment of wrist function and patient recovery. Fractures were considered consolidated based on follow-up radiographs taken in multiple planes, showing significant trabeculation crossing the fracture site and an absence of pain at the affected area. Radiologic confirmation of union was observed in 27 cases, and 1 patient show non-union.

The duration for patients to return to work ranged from 2 months, depending on the nature of their occupation. For more physically demanding activities, such as active sports, the return period ranged from 6 to 8 months. This delay was attributed primarily to the need for clear radiographic evidence of fracture union before resuming high-impact activities. At the 6-week follow-up, all patients achieved full flexion, extension, and ulnar deviation. Radial deviation, initially lagging behind, was equal to the contralateral side by 3 months in 12 patients and by 4 months in 3 patients, reflecting a gradual but consistent recovery pattern.

Grip strength also demonstrated a significant recovery trajectory. The mean power grip reached 90% of the contralateral hand by 6 weeks postoperatively and improved further to 98% by the 12-month mark. Pinch grip strength, on the other hand, showed a rapid return to normal levels, with the mean value equaling the contralateral side by 6 months. These findings underscore the efficiency of the treatment and rehabilitation process in restoring functional hand strength.

The average postoperative modified Mayo wrist score was 98, with a range of 95 to 100, indicating excellent outcomes for the majority of the patients. No postoperative complications, such as wound infection, reflex sympathetic dystrophy, scar-related pain or hypertrophy, hardware failure or loosening, malunion, or avascular necrosis, were observed during the follow-up period. Furthermore, there was no radiographic evidence of scapholunate instability or osteoarthritis at the site of screw insertion.

Mild postoperative pain was reported by 4 patients at the 6-month mark, specifically during terminal full flexion and extension of the wrist. However, this

discomfort resolved entirely by the end of the 12-month follow-up. These results reflect not only the technical success of the surgical intervention but also the overall safety and efficacy of the approach in facilitating recovery and minimizing long-term complications.

DISCUSSION

The Herbert screw has proven to be an effective method for treating scaphoid fractures that have failed to unite or exhibit features indicating a poor prognosis with conservative treatment⁷. While conservative management achieves union in approximately 90% of cases (Böhler, Trojan, and Jahna, 1954; London, 1961; Cooney, Dobyns, and Linscheid, 1980), the process requires prolonged immobilization lasting several months⁸. In cases where conservative treatment fails, the Matti-Russe bone graft procedure is a reliable alternative, with an 85% success rate.^(russe1960;D green 1985, Mulder, 1968; Trojan, 1974) However, this method also demands extended immobilization, often up to six months⁹. The Herbert screw facilitates quicker union, significantly reduces postoperative immobilization periods, and allows patients to return to their daily activities much earlier¹⁰.

To ensure optimal results with the Herbert screw, careful attention must be given to the alignment of the apparatus during surgery¹¹. Specifically, the distance between the tip of the drill and the spike on the fixation arm should not exceed 2 mm when the drill is fully inserted¹². Testing of the surgical equipment has occasionally revealed gaps of over 4 mm due to either a deformed jig or a shortened drill. If such errors occur, the use of a shorter screw may lead to inadequate fracture compression, as the leading thread fails to grip the proximal pole effectively¹³. Therefore, surgeons are advised to verify the distance between the fully inserted drill tip and the fixation spike before each procedure.

Radiological union following Herbert screw fixation has been consistently successful, as demonstrated in 27 of 28 cases in this series and supported by similar findings in the literature (Herbert and Fisher, 1984; Bunker *et al.*, 1987)¹⁴. Internal fixation not only expedites bone healing but also reduces the need for extensive postoperative immobilization. Percutaneous, minimally invasive techniques offer additional benefits by preserving the palmar ligament complex and local vascularity. This method avoids complications associated with open surgical approaches, such as reflex sympathetic dystrophy, painful scars, and prolonged immobilization¹⁵. In a study of percutaneous treatment, union was achieved in all patients within a mean of 57 days, ranging from 35 to 70 days¹⁶. Post-union outcomes included restored range of motion, grip strength at 98% of the contralateral side within three months, and return to sedentary work within four days and manual labour within five weeks¹⁷.

Central screw placement is crucial for achieving optimal results, with both volar and dorsal portals available for entry¹⁸. The volar approach is often preferred due to its ease of entry point detection, reduced risk of damage to the radiocarpal joint and extensor tendons, and stabilization of fractures in extension. This approach is particularly advantageous for fractures near the distal pole, whereas the dorsal approach may be better suited for proximal fractures¹⁹. Nevertheless, each approach carries specific risks. The dorsal approach may endanger the extensor tendon and posterior interosseous nerve, while the volar approach poses risks to the superficial palmar arch and recurrent branch of the median nerve. A mini-incision technique can mitigate these risks²⁰. Research suggests no significant difference in clinical outcomes, union times, and gripping or pinching strength between volar and dorsal approaches (Polsky *et al.*, 2016; Jeon *et al.*, 2017).

Controversy exists over the entry point for volar screw placement-whether to enter through the trapezium or avoid it. Cadaveric studies indicate that the transtrapezium approach reliably achieves central positioning of the screw in both proximal and distal poles, offering biomechanical advantages²¹. However, this technique risks scaphotrapezium joint damage, leading many to advocate for an entry point that bypasses this joint²². Open techniques are generally recommended for treating delayed scaphoid fractures, as bone grafts are often necessary Kamineni S, LAW C. Percutaneous fixation of scaphoid fractures: An anatomical study. *Journal of Hand Surgery*. 1999 Feb;24(1):85-8.

Defining union remains a topic of debate, with many studies relying on radiological evidence at the end of immobilization or shortly thereafter (Stewart, 1954; London, 1961; Eddeland *et al.*, 1975; Cooney *et al.*, 1980; Leslie and Dickson, 1981; Morgan and Walters, 1984; Langhoff and Andersen, 1988; Gellman *et al.*, 1989). Some researchers accept cases where the fracture line remains visible (Goldman, Lipscomb, and Taylor, 1969)²³. The findings presented here confirm that internal fixation provides superior functional outcomes compared to traditional bone grafting techniques (Warren-Smith and Barton, 1988). This improvement is attributed to the precise reconstruction of the scaphoid and the benefits of early postoperative mobilization. Notably, functional improvements are maintained even in cases of persistent nonunion (Dent *et al.*, 1992), supporting the use of internal fixation, even for ischaemic nonunion (D3). In our study we found only 1 case underwent in non-union which needed revision surgery of bone grafting²⁴.

There are certain limitation of our study as it is retrospective study. Scaphoid fractures are the most common fractures of the carpal bones, accounting for approximately **70% to 80% of all carpal fractures** and **2% to 7% of all fractures** in the body. Due to this we have small sample size. There is no any

radiological confirmation for early detection of union. Limited choices of implants²⁵.

CONCLUSION

Percutaneous screw fixation of scaphoid fractures has become increasingly popular due to advancements in instrumentation, low morbidity, and excellent clinical outcomes. This technique eliminates the need for prolonged cast immobilization, enabling a quicker return to work and sports activities compared to conservative treatment. It is particularly advantageous for young, active individuals, offering faster union times and an accelerated recovery process.

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