

Radial Head Fracture

Patient Information

Trauma & Orthopaedics Department



The Patient Information Leaflets page on the Trust website is available on the link:
<https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets> or scan the QR code.

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Introduction

You have a very small break in the radial head or neck - one of the bones in your elbow. These fractures are a common injury and heal well with time and use - no specific treatment or follow-up is necessary.

We would expect you to return to normal function within 6-8 weeks of your injury.



Exercise

A sling will support your elbow for up to 2 weeks, but it is important to exercise your elbow to increase the range of movement gently right away. Moving your elbow will not stop the fracture healing. We have included some exercises to help you. You should do the exercises several times a day.

It is important that you do not allow your shoulder, wrist, and hand to become stiff, and it is safe to move these joints throughout the day. This will help reduce swelling too.

General Advice

When your arm is in the sling or resting on pillows, have the hand slightly higher than the elbow.

Discard the sling as soon as comfortable.

Simple painkillers e.g. paracetamol can help you return to normal function.

Using ice can help with your pain and swelling. You should only apply an ice pack to skin with normal sensation, and if the skin is not broken, damaged or cut. Always wrap the ice in a damp towel and check the skin regularly for signs of ice burn, such as excessive change in the skin's colour, or blistering.

Smoking slows down healing. We advise that you stop (at least whilst recovering from your injury), speak to your GP or you can go online at <https://www.nhs.uk/smokefree>.

Exercises




Overhead Extension	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lie on your back. <p>Raise your injured arm up so that your upper arm is pointing up towards the ceiling.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•• Hold it in position with your other hand (see picture).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keeping your upper arm still, slowly relax your elbow, so that it bends, and your hand moves towards your head.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keeping your upper arm still, slowly straighten your elbow, so that your hand points towards the ceiling.

Table Slides

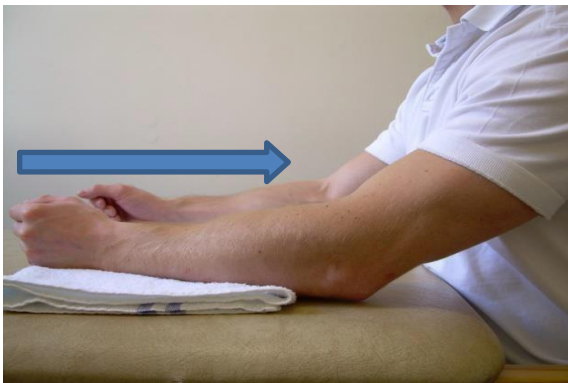


- Sit at a table or stand at the kitchen work-top
- Rest your hands on a towel (with your palms facing inwards)



- Watching your elbow crease, slide the towel forwards with both hands
- Only go forwards whilst your elbow is moving

- Pause



- Return by sliding your elbows and hands back, watching the crease
- As you feel more comfortable, you can pull your elbows back towards you, and at the same time, lean your body forwards over your elbows. This will help them bend further

Rotation Exercise



- Stand with your elbows flexed and tucked into your side, hands in front



- Slowly rotate both palms to face up
- Slowly rotate both palms to face down

Wall Slides



- Stand close to a wall, facing the wall.
- Place both hands on a towel (not shown) on the wall. You can grip the towel if this is easier.



- Slowly slide the towel up the wall with both hands. Only slide when your elbow crease is moving.

Once your elbow crease stops moving, pause and stand on your tip toes – as if you were trying to reach something from a high shelf. Pause and then lower your heels.

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- Slide your hands down on the towel by tucking in your elbows.
- You can gain more elbow bend by standing closer to the wall as your arms lower.

Disclaimer

Not all exercises are suitable for everyone, and while every precaution was taken in selecting these exercises in this leaflet, they do not come without risks. If you have any concerns regarding your injury, or whether or not you should partake in the exercises, then you should consult your GP or physiotherapist before beginning any exercises shown in this leaflet.

It is quite normal to feel some discomfort following exercise, but it is important that this discomfort eases within 2 hours of finishing the exercise and doesn't have an overall negative effect on your symptoms.

The exercise plans shown in this leaflet are designed to be used as a guide and a point of reference; they can be modified and progressed under the supervision of your physiotherapist.

Frequently asked questions

When can I drive?

It is your own responsibility. You are allowed to drive when:

- You can safely control the car
- You are no longer using the sling
- You can perform an emergency stop.

When can I go back to work?

This depends on your individual situation. You can return to work when you feel able to do your job. Consider a phased return if needed/possible.

Further advice

You must get in touch with the fracture clinic if:

- You experience any locking (elbow getting stuck in one position)
- Your pain persists or gets worse, despite taking pain killers.
- Do not forcibly stretch your elbow in the first 6 weeks – this may cause pain and delay healing
- Full recovery may take up to 12 months
- **There is a small risk that you may experience a loss of end range movement at the elbow, especially on straightening it, but this is unlikely to affect your function long term.**

For more information online, please visit <https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/virtual-fracture-clinic>

If your Symptoms are not improving or you have any concerns, please contact:

Fracture Clinic: 01942 822595 Monday to Friday 8am until 5pm.

If you are struggling to regain your movement or get back to normal activities, you can self-refer to **Physiotherapy**. A referral form can be found on this webpage.

<https://www.wvl.nhs.uk/adult-msk-physiotherapy-self-referral>

If you have any urgent concerns out of hours, please call 111.

Please use this space to write notes or reminders.

Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends, and carers.

Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am until 4pm)

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Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the positives and negatives of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use, and store the information we hold about you, please see patient information leaflet, Ref. Corp 006 How we use your information, this can be found on the Patient Information Leaflets page on the Trust website, see details on the front cover.

This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille, and other languages upon request. For more information, please ask in the department/ward.

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