

# Aftercare for a radial head fracture in your elbow

Emergency Department

Information for Patients

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This leaflet will tell you about your injury, recovery and some exercises you should do after your injury.

## What is a radial head fracture?

Your X-rays shows that you have an uncomplicated break of your radial head. The radial head is the top of your radius. The radius is 1 of your 2 forearm bones. These bones make part of your elbow joint.

## What treatment will I need?

Radial head fractures normally heal very well on their own after a short time in a sling.

**You should wear your sling for 2 to 3 days (no longer than 1 week).**

After this time, it is important to slowly start using your arm as much as your pain lets you.

While your arm is getting better in the sling, you must keep the joints and muscles moving around the injury. This helps stop stiffness. It also helps with blood circulation which can help you recover quicker.

Exercises can be found on page 4 of this leaflet.

We will refer you to the fracture clinic who will look at your X-rays. Most people do not need any more hospital appointments. The fracture clinic team will contact you if they feel that your injury needs more appointments.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.uhleicester.nhs.uk](http://www.uhleicester.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net)

## It is uncomfortable and looks different, is that normal?

This is an uncomfortable injury. You should take your pain relief regularly, as advised by the clinician that saw you.

You can visit [www.yourhealth.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/library](http://www.yourhealth.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/library) and search for: 'Taking pain relief for an injury after discharge from the Emergency Department' or leaflet number 1238.

It is normal to have swelling. You may have bruising which can go down your arm and makes your fingers swollen. This can last for a few weeks.

It may take 6 to 8 weeks for the pain to go away completely.

## How should I have my sling?

You should find a position that is most comfortable for you. It should be similar to the position on the picture.

It is your choice if you want to wear the sling at night.



## How do I take care of my arm?

- Wearing a sling can affect your balance. You may be at a higher risk of falling over. You must take care on the stairs.
- Do not wear any jewelry on this side until the swelling has gone. The jewelry may get too tight causing injury to the fingers or wrist.
- You may find it difficult to get comfortable in bed at night. Use plenty of pillows to support your elbow.
- You will need to remove your sling to wash yourself.
- It is easier and less painful to undress your injured arm last. It is easier to dress the injured arm first.
- Avoid lifting or carrying on the injured side for 4 to 6 weeks. Or until you feel comfortable to. Build this up slowly.
- Avoid sports. Do not do contact sports like football, for at least 4 to 6 weeks.

### Avoiding smoking as this can delay healing.

Scan the QR code or go to:

[www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/nhs-stop-smoking-services-help-you-quit/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/nhs-stop-smoking-services-help-you-quit/)



### Eat a well balanced diet as this can help with healing.

Scan the QR code or go to:

[www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/)



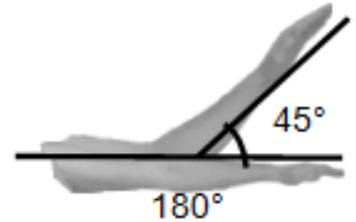
## How can I help healing?

### I cannot move my elbow properly, is this normal?

Many people with radial head fractures find that they cannot fully straighten or bend their elbow. Over time and with the exercises on page 4 this will get better.

In some cases, you may not be able to fully straighten your elbow after the fracture has fully healed. This should not cause problems with using your arm in daily life.

You can expect to lose a small degree of straightening (extension) of your elbow joint.



If at 3 months you have:

- lost over 45 degrees of extension,
- it affects your daily functions

Ask your GP to refer you back to the orthopaedic team. You might then need more treatment.

You can also self refer for physiotherapy by calling **0300 300 0046**.

### Can I drive?

You should contact your insurance provider before driving. Your injury may affect your insurance. Once you are out of your sling, you must be able to safely perform an emergency stop or maneuver. You should always be in full control of your vehicle comfortably.

### Can I work?

This depends on what job you do.

If the job is manual and you need to drive, you may need to take some time off.

The doctors in fracture clinic or your G.P can give you with a fit note if you did not get one from the emergency department.

### General advice about these exercises:

Little and often is better.

As you start to use your arm for longer periods you may feel an ache around the elbow . This is normal.



## Exercises

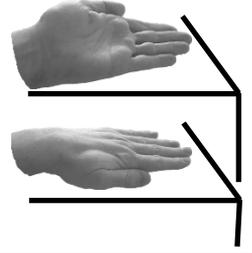
### Exercise 1

1. Bend and straighten your elbow.
2. Repeat this 10 times.
3. Do this 3 times a day.



### Exercise 2

1. Turn your palm to face upwards then turn it downwards on table.
2. Repeat this 10 times.
3. Do this 3 times a day.



### Exercise 3

1. After 3 weeks stand in front of a mirror with arms out to your sides.
2. Bend your elbow to touch shoulders as shown on the picture.
3. Repeat this 10 times.
4. Do this 3 times a day.



## Contact details

Injuries Unit **0116 258 5727**

Fracture clinic Leicester Royal Infirmary: **0116 258 5430**

You can also contact your GP for further advice.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।  
Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net)