



**University  
Hospitals Sussex**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Elbow dislocation

Physiotherapy department

Patient information



Location of elbow dislocation

## What is this information about?

This information is about elbow dislocation.

### It tells you:

- How to look after yourself when you go home from hospital with a dislocated elbow.
- What exercises you can do to help heal and strengthen your arm.
- What follow-up treatment you might have.
- Who to contact if you need further help and support.

## What is an elbow dislocation?

Elbow dislocation happens when the humerus, ulna and radius (the elbow bones) move out of place where they meet at the elbow joint.

## How long is it likely to take for my injury to heal?

It usually takes around 6 to 12 weeks for an elbow dislocation to heal.

## Will smoking or vaping slow down my healing?

Yes. Smoking slows healing so if you smoke or vape try to stop or cut down. This is most important in the first 2 weeks after your injury. If you would like help to stop smoking talk to your GP or visit **Quit smoking – NHS** [www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/) for further information.

## What should I do if I am in pain after my elbow dislocation?

If you are in pain, take your usual pain killers or pain killers given to you in the emergency department. Follow the dose instructions on the packet. If you are struggling with pain do speak to your GP or pharmacist.

## What must I do if the feeling (sensation) in my fingers changes?

Some people may get pins and needles (tingling) especially in their fourth (little) and third (ring) fingers. Moving your fingers and thumb may help.

### If:

- The sensation gets much worse in your fingers.
- You completely lose feeling, and you are unable to move fingers.

Please contact the virtual fracture clinic (see contact details at the end of this information) or come to A&E if it is outside of normal working hours (Monday to Friday from 08:30am to 4:30pm).

## Will I have a plaster cast or sling after I have had an elbow dislocation?

You may have a plaster cast (sometimes called a backslab) and sling or you may not. Both options can have good results in healing elbow dislocations. You do not need to worry if you do not have a plaster cast but if you would like to talk with us about this, please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic.

## What should I do to care for myself if I have a plaster cast?

### Do:

- Keep your arm supported in your sling or on some pillows if you find it more comfortable.
- The exercises which are shown later in this information.

### Do not:

- Use anything to scratch yourself under the cast.
- Trim or cut down the length of the cast.

## What happens if my plaster cast gets wet?

- It is important to keep your cast dry. If it gets wet, it can become weaker.
- If your cast gets slightly wet or damp you can dry it with a hair dryer.
- If your cast gets very wet, it will need to be changed. Please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic.
- To prevent the cast from getting wet some people find waterproof cast covers useful. You can find and buy these online. Search for 'waterproof cover for cast'. You can also buy them at some pharmacies.

## What should I do if I am struggling with my sling, plaster cast or brace?

Do contact the virtual fracture clinic. We can give you advice or arrange for your sling or cast to be changed if needed.

## Will I have a further (follow up) appointment?

Yes. We will arrange for you to see a specialist 7 to 14 days after your injury. Your cast will be removed if you have one, and the specialist will check your elbow. They will decide you need a cast or brace or further X-rays or other imaging (scans). They will talk with you about the next stage of your treatment.

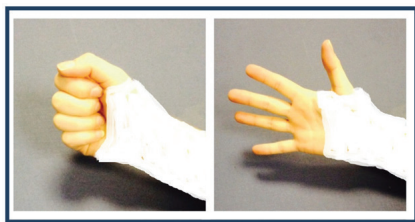
You will be sent an appointment time and date by post, or you get a phone call if it is close to the appointment date.

## What should I do in the first one to three days after my injury?

Rest your arm for the first 24 to 72 hours (1 to 3 days). However, it is important to keep moving around and moving your fingers and shoulder, so they do not get stiff. Do this gently, without causing too much pain.

## What should I do in the first and second week after my injury?

After you have rested your arm for 1 to 3 days, do these exercises about 5 times a day:



Finger bend and straighten exercise

Bend and straighten your fingers. Open and close your hand about 10 times as shown.

It is likely that after you have had your appointment with the specialist you will be asked to move on to doing the exercises below about 5 times a day:



Elbow bend and straighten exercise

## Elbow bend and straighten

Bend and straighten your elbow as far as you can without pain. You should not feel more than a mild to moderate stretch. You can use your other arm to help you if you need to. **Repeat this 10 times if there is no increase in pain.**

## Forearm rotations

Keep your elbow at your side and bent to 90 degrees (a right angle) so your arm is in an L shape by your side. Slowly turn your palm up and down. You should not feel more than a mild to moderate stretch. You can use your other arm to help if you need to. Repeat ten times if there is no increase in pain.

## What should I be doing from week two after my injury?

The specialist will give you advice for the next stage of your rehab (rehabilitation) at your follow up appointment. You may need to wear a brace for up to six weeks. The specialist will tell you if you need to. A brace supports your elbow but lets you move it.

## What other things can the Virtual Fracture Clinic help me with?

Please contact virtual fracture clinic if:

- You are concerned about your symptoms.
- Are struggling to return to exercise or your usual activities.
- You would like further information or support after you have read this information.

## When can I start driving?

You can return to driving when:

- You are no longer using a plaster cast, a brace or arm sling.
- You can turn the steering wheel as much as you need to without it is hurting.
- You can safely deal with all emergency situations without being in pain or hesitating. For example, you must be able to stop the car quickly and in full control and safely avoid obstacles.
- You are covered by your insurance company.

### Be aware

Always try driving in a safe place first.

## How can I get a certificate to say that I am fit to work?

You can get a fitness for work statement from the Virtual Fracture Clinic.

# How do I contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic?

## Worthing

Phone: 01903 205 111 Ext. 86312

## St. Richards

Phone: 01243 788 122 Ext. 35503

Email: [uhsussex.vfc@nhs.net](mailto:uhsussex.vfc@nhs.net)

### Working hours:

Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm. We aim to respond to messages within 24 hours during these times. At times you may receive a call outside of these hours.

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This leaflet is intended for patients receiving care in Worthing and St Richard's Hospitals.

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