



**University
Hospitals Sussex**
NHS Foundation Trust

Olecranon elbow fracture

Physiotherapy department

Patient information

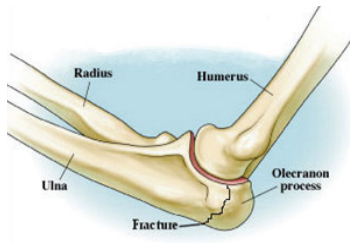


Illustration of an olecranon fracture

What is this information about?

This information is about an olecranon fracture.

It tells you:

- how to look after yourself when you go home from hospital with an olecranon fracture
- 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 olecranon fracture?

An olecranon fracture is a break in the bony tip of the elbow.

Do I have a fracture or a break?

If you have a fracture, it means you have a broken bone. 'Fractured bone' and 'broken bone' both mean the same.

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

It usually takes around 6 to 8 weeks for an olecranon fracture to heal but can take longer. Some people with an olecranon fracture need an operation to repair the fracture.

Be aware

You may still have some stiffness in your elbow or not be able to fully straighten it even after your fracture has been treated or has healed as much as it can. This depends on your fracture and how we have to manage it.

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 \[www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking\]\(https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking\)](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking) for further information.

What should I do if I am in pain after my olecranon fracture?

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 olecranon fracture?

You may have an above elbow plaster cast (sometimes called a backslab) and a sling.

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 or plaster cast?

Do contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic. We can give you advice or arrange for your sling or cast to be changed if you need that.

Will I have a further (follow up) appointment?

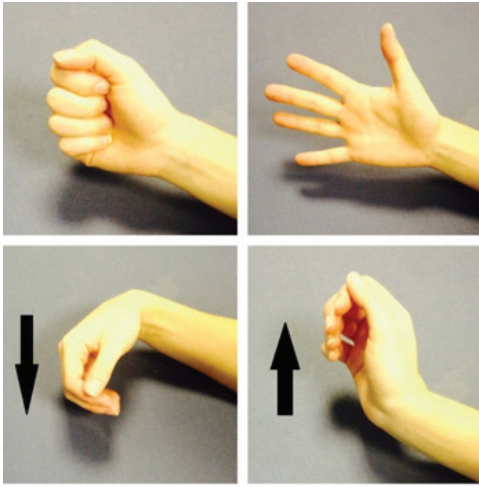
Yes. We will arrange for you to see a specialist 1 to 2 weeks after your injury. The specialist will make a clear plan to manage your injury and talk with you about what it includes.

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

What should I do from week 1 to week 3 after my injury?

- Rest your arm for the first 24 to 72 hours (1 to 3 three 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
- Always wear a sling
- Keep your shoulder and neck moving as much as possible
- Do the following exercises 5 times a day:

Finger and wrist bending and straightening



Open and close your hand as shown ten times. Then move your wrist up and down **10 times.**

After a few days move on to holding a soft ball or a ball of socks. Squeeze the ball as hard as you can without it causing you pain. **Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 10 times.**

What should I be doing from week three after my injury?

If you do not need an operation continue to follow the advice given by the specialist in your Fracture Clinic follow up appointment. Avoid lifting more than the weight of a cup of tea for 6 weeks.

If your olecranon needs an operation your treatment will be managed by the Orthopaedic (bone specialist) team. They will plan how to fix your break with an operation. They will give you clear instructions about anything you should do.

What should I do from week six after my injury?

If your Olecranon fracture does not need an operation to fix it, it should be healed by around 6 weeks after your injury.

You can return to doing your usual activities but be guided by any pain you get. You may need to wait a little longer before you can do some things comfortably, do less of them, or not do them so often. Heavy tasks or exercise are more likely to cause you discomfort.

What should I do if I am:

- concerned about my symptoms
- struggling to return to exercise or your usual activities
- would like further information or support after you have read this information?

Please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic.

When can I start driving?

You can return to driving when:

- you are no longer in a plaster cast or in a sling
- you can turn the steering wheel as much as you need to without it 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?

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.

Worthing

01903 205111 Ext. 86312

uhsussex.vfc@nhs.net

St Richards

01243 788122 Ext. 35503

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

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