

Proximal Humerus (upper arm bone) fracture

Physiotherapy department

Patient information



Location of proximal humerus (upper arm bone) fracture.

What is this information about?

This information is about proximal humerus (upper arm bone) fracture. **It tells you:**

- how to look after yourself when you go home from hospital with a proximal humerus 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 a proximal humerus fracture?

This is a break to the top of your upper arm bone.

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 6 to 12 weeks for proximal humerus fracture to heal. Your shoulder is likely to be stiff even after your fracture has healed. Stiffness is often worst when you lift your arm over your head. Your aim is to gain enough movement to do day-to-day activities. This care plan will help.

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** www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/ for further information.

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

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

Was the sling that I was fitted with in A&E the best type for my proximal humerus fracture?

The best type of sling for your proximal humerus fracture is a 'collar and cuff' sling (shown below). Wearing this type of sling should mean that you are as comfortable as you can be and that your injury heals as well as possible.

Do

- ✓ Contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic if you were, or think you may have been, fitted with a different type of sling. We will arrange a new appointment to fit you a collar and cuff sling.



A collar and cuff sling

Why was I fitted a collar and cuff sling?

A collar and cuff sling allows your shoulder to rest and keeps it in the best position to help it to heal. Make sure that you do not place pillows below your elbow to prop up the arm.

The lower loop of your collar and cuff sling should have enough space to allow you to remove your hand from the sling.

When should I be wearing my collar and cuff?

Use your collar and cuff for 6 weeks, including in bed at night. You can take it off to wash, dress and do your exercises.

What should I do if I am struggling with my sling?

Do

- ✓ contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic. We can give you advice or arrange for your sling to be changed if needed.

When should I start exercising?

It is important to start gentle exercises straight away to prevent stiffness when you are doing the exercises which are shown later in this information.

Be aware

You should avoid any heavy lifting or overhead movement for 6 full weeks.

Will I have further (follow up) appointments?

Yes. You will need to have a follow up appointment 3 weeks after your injury. The specialist will examine your shoulder and may do another X-ray to check the position of your fracture. The specialist will also explain you the next stage of your rehabilitation. You will be sent an appointment time and date by post.

Be aware

If you are over 50 years old this type of fracture can be a sign of osteoporosis. **Do** speak to your GP about a bone health check.

What should I do from week one to week three after my injury?

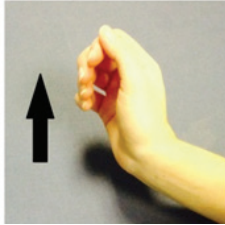
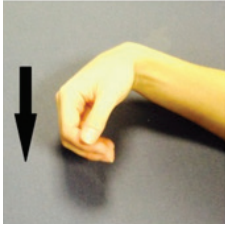
- Remember to use your collar and cuff sling for the first 6 weeks, including in bed at night. Take it off to wash, dress and do your exercises. You may find it more comfortable to sleep propped up on pillows.
- Rest your arm for the first 24 to 72 hours (1 to 3 days). However, it is important to keep moving around.
- Move your fingers, wrist and elbow whilst wearing your collar and cuff sling, so they do not get stiff. Do this gently, without causing too much pain.
- Apply cold packs (ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every few hours. Cold pack applications can provide short-term pain relief.
- Take arm out of the sling to wash, dress and do your exercises which are shown below.

Be aware

The ice must never be in direct contact with the skin.

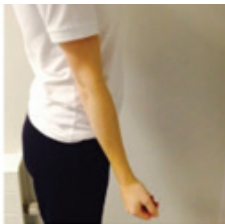
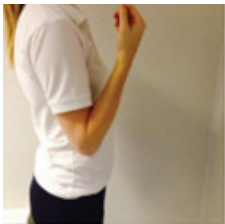
- Aim to do all the exercises 5 times a day. These exercises should not cause too much pain. Do fewer if they are making your pain worse.

Hand, wrist and elbow exercises



Finger and wrist bending and straightening: open and close your hand as shown **10 times**. Then move your wrist up and down **10 times**.

After around 3 to 5 days progress to holding a soft ball or ball of socks. Squeeze the ball as hard as possible without pain. **Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 10 times.**



Elbow bending to 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 if you need to. **Repeat 10 times if there is no increase in pain.**

Forearm rotations: keep your elbow at your side and bent to 90 degrees. Slowly turn your palm up (supination) and down (pronation). You should not feel more than a mild to moderate stretch. You can use your other arm to help if you need to. **Repeat 10 times if there is no increase in pain.**

Posture exercise:

Bring your shoulders back and gently squeeze your shoulder blades together.

Hold for 30 seconds.

Repeat 5 times.



Shoulder pendulum exercises

Stand next to a firm surface. Support yourself with your un-injured arm and lean forwards. Let your injured arm relax and hang down to the ground.

Gently swing your arm, making a small movement. Try to do this forward and backward, side to side and in small circles.



Aim to do this for 1 to 2 minutes in total. This exercise can cause some discomfort when you first start to do it. This will usually ease off after you have repeated the exercise a few times.

Swing your arm gently so it does not cause you too much discomfort. Remember keep your arm relaxed.

Be aware

Please avoid doing these movements:



What should I do from week three to week six after my injury?

- By this time, you will have an appointment with a shoulder specialist.
- Continue using your collar and cuff. Take your arm out of the sling to wash, dress and do your exercises which are shown below.
- Start these exercises 3 weeks after your injury. Aim to do them 5 times a day. **Repeat each exercise 10 times.** These exercises should not cause too much pain. Do fewer if they are making your pain worse.
- You should not do any heavy lifting for 6 weeks.

Exercises:

Supported arm elevation

Use your other hand to lift your injured arm up in front of you, as shown in these pictures.



Supported arm rotation

With your elbow touching the side of your body, bend your injured arm as shown below. Hold onto a stick, umbrella, or something similar. Then move your injured forearm outwards away from your body. As you do this, keep your elbow bent and tucked into your side.



Use your good arm to gently push the hand of your injured arm outwards. Remember to keep your elbow tucked in. If you do not have a stick, hold your injured arm at the wrist and guide it outwards with your good hand.

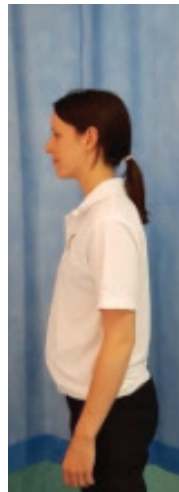
What should I do from week six after my injury?

- ✓ Stop using the collar and cuff sling.
- ✓ Return to light activities. Gradually increase your day-to-day activity and be guided by any pain or discomfort you have. Some heavier tasks may still be uncomfortable.
- ✓ Start the exercises below. **Aim to do these exercises 5 times a day. Repeat each exercise 10 times.**

Exercises:

Arm elevation

Lift your arm forwards in front of you. Try to raise the arm as high as you can. This exercise can cause some discomfort. You do not need to raise your arm so high or for so long that it causes too much pain. If this is too difficult, try the same movement with a bent elbow.



Raising your arm out to the side

With your palm facing forwards, move your arm out to the side in a big arc. Try to raise your arm as high as you can. If this is too difficult, try the same movement with a bent elbow. You do not need to raise your arm so high or for so long that it causes too much pain.



Arm rotation

Start with your elbow bent by your side. Move your forearm out to the side, keeping your elbow bent and near your waist.



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

Please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic if you:

- are concerned about your symptoms
- are unable to follow this rehabilitation plan or notice pain other than at your shoulder
- struggling with your collar and cuff sling
- are struggling to return to exercise or your usual activities
- 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 your arm collar and cuff or any other type of 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 note for work?

Please contact 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.

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01903 205111 Ext. 86312

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