



**University  
Hospitals Sussex**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Elbow dislocation

Virtual Fracture Clinic

Patient information



Location of elbow dislocation

## What is this information about?

This information is about an 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?

An elbow dislocation happens when the bones that form the elbow joint move out of place.

## 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/or you are unable to move your 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 8am to 4pm).

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

You do not need to be in a cast for this injury. Your sling should be worn for comfort. You can take it off to wash, dress and to 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.

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

Yes. We will arrange for you to see a specialist 10 to 14 days after your injury. They will examine the stability of your elbow. 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 your fingers, wrist, and shoulder, 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. This can provide short-term pain relief.

### Be aware

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

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

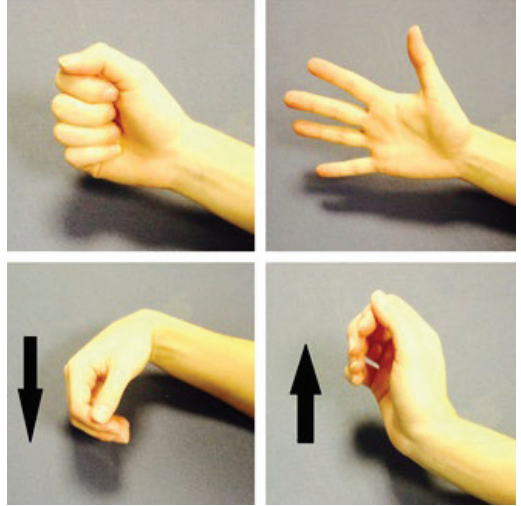
Try to do these exercises 4-5 times a day. Repeat each exercise 10 times.

## Finger and wrist bending and straightening

Open and close your hand as shown. Then move your wrist up and down.

After a few days move on to hold 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.**

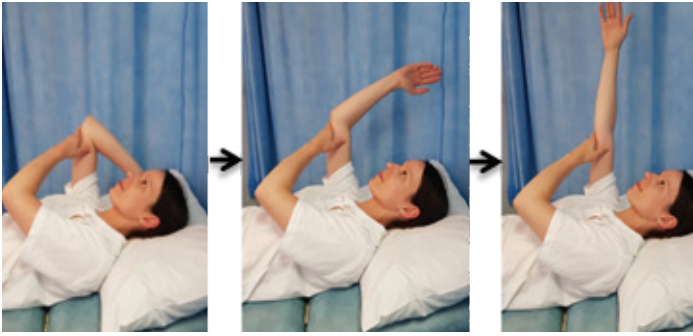


## Elbow exercises

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 may feel a mild to moderate stretch but do not push into pain.

You can use your other arm to help if you need to.





Lie on your back. Raise your injured arm so that your elbow points to the ceiling. Support your elbow with your other hand.

Slowly straighten your arm to lift the hand in the air.

Gradually lower your hand back down to the pillow. Repeat.

### **Modification:**

If you have a problem with your shoulder, you may not be able to get into this position. You can modify the exercise to make it easier.

Lie on your back. Rest your arm by your side. Practice bending and straightening your elbow. Keep your elbow and upper arm resting on the bed while you do this movement.

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

The specialist will give you advice for the next stage of your rehabilitation at your follow up appointment.

You should avoid lifting anything more than the weight of a cup of tea for the first six weeks. You can do light activities when your pain has settled.

## 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 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 sling
- can turn the steering wheel as much as you need to without pain
- 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
- are covered by your insurance company.

### Be aware

Always try driving in a safe place first.

## How can I get a fit note for work?

You can get a fit note from the Virtual Fracture Clinic team, or the specialist at your fracture clinic appointment.

## Who do I contact if I need to change my appointment?

If you have not yet been seen face-to-face in the fracture clinic, please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic on the details below. If you have already been seen in a fracture clinic, please contact the booking hub on **0300 3038360**.

## If I need further advice about my injury, who can I contact?

Please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic on the below details:

### Royal Sussex County Hospital

**01273 696955 Ext. 63428**     [uhsussex.fracturecare@nhs.net](mailto:uhsussex.fracturecare@nhs.net)

Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm.

If contacting by phone, please leave a message with your date of birth, name and clear contact details, along with a brief message about what problems you are having.

We will contact you back as soon as possible. We aim to get back to you within 24 hours.

Contacting us by email would be preferable as the phone line can be very busy.

**Today's research is tomorrow's treatments.  
That's why UHSx is proud to be a research-active Trust.**

Find out how you can get involved. Visit our website [www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/research-and-innovation/information-for-patients-and-public](http://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/research-and-innovation/information-for-patients-and-public) or scan the QR code



This leaflet is intended for patients receiving care in Brighton and Hove and Haywards Heath.

Ref. number: 2721 Publication date: 03/2026 Review date: 03/2029

© University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust Disclaimer:  
The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

