

Physiotherapy Department

# Helping your elbow to recover after a radial head fracture

Information for patients





This leaflet gives you advice and exercises to help your elbow to recover after your radial head fracture.

Radial head fractures are not treated in a plaster cast, as the fracture is stable. This means you can move the joint without causing damage. It is very important to get your arm moving as soon as possible, to avoid joint stiffness and muscle tightness. At first, your elbow will feel stiff and painful, but it is important that you continue to move it as this will aid your recovery.

It usually takes approximately 6 weeks for the fracture to fully heal. During this time, do not stress the joint with heavy lifting or heavy weight-bearing.

## Normal use

It will not cause any further damage if you continue to use your elbow normally for everyday activities. This may make your elbow sore in the early stages, but you will be able to gradually increase your activity as the pain and swelling subside.

Do not return to contact sport until you are pain free and for at least 6 weeks after the injury.

## Swelling and pain

Your elbow may swell up after the injury. If this happens, keep your elbow raised as much as possible. This will minimise (reduce) the swelling. One way of doing this is by keeping your elbow raised on pillows above the level of your heart.

Pain and swelling can be eased by applying ice for approximately 15 minutes, 3-4 times a day. Wrap the ice in a damp towel to protect your skin.

Basic painkillers will also help. Speak to your GP or Pharmacist if you need further advice about pain relief.

## Exercise

It is important that you start to exercise your elbow as soon as possible, in order to regain normal movement. By exercising, the feeling of stiffness and pain will gradually ease. You may find your shoulder, wrist and finger joints are stiff too, so keep them moving if they are not injured. You may have been given a sling to use as a temporary measure. Gradually try reducing how often you wear this as soon as possible, so that you can start using your arm normally.

The exercises will be most effective if practiced regularly. We suggest doing them 3-4 times a day. It is better to repeat the exercises little and often, rather than once a day for a longer period.

### The exercises

We suggest that the following exercises are held for 5 seconds and each repeated 10 times.

#### 1. Elbow Flexion/Extension

When standing:

a) Bend and straighten your elbow **fully**.

b) Apply some added gentle pressure with your other hand to help your arm to bend, and then help your arm to straighten.



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## 2. **Supination/Pronation**

When sitting:

Rest your arm on a table or hold your elbow into your side. Turn your palm up then down, keeping your elbow still.



## Feedback

We aim to provide you with a high quality service at all times. If you have any comments, concerns, or complaints about your experience of our service, please tell a member of the team or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service.

### **John Radcliffe Hospital**

PALS Office  
Level 2, Main entrance  
John Radcliffe Hospital  
Headley Way  
Headington  
Oxford, OX3 9DU

Tel: 01865 221 473

Email: [PALS@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:PALS@ouh.nhs.uk)

### **Horton General Hospital**

PALS Office  
Horton General Hospital  
Oxford Road  
Banbury, OX16 9AL

Tel: 01295 229 259

Email: [PALS@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:PALS@ouh.nhs.uk)

## Useful telephone numbers

If you continue to have pain 8 weeks after your injury, despite taking regular painkillers and caring for your injury as advised, or if at any point you are worried your injury is not healing, please contact the New Patient Clinic for an appointment.

### **New Patient (Fracture) Clinic at:**

John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford

Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm

Saturday and Sunday, 9.00am to 11.00am

Tel: **01865 220 217**

OR

Horton General Hospital, Banbury

Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 11.00am

Tel: **01295 229 606**

### **Physiotherapy (John Radcliffe)**

Tel: **01865 221 540**

### **Physiotherapy (Horton)**

Tel: **01295 229 432**

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter,  
a document in Easy Read, another language, large print,  
Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473**  
or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

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