

## Patient Information

# Elbow fracture

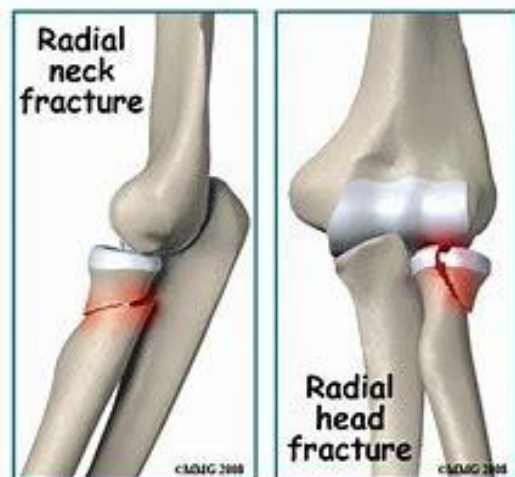
## Introduction

This leaflet provides you with advice about caring for your injured elbow.

The most common type of bony injury to an elbow is known as a radial fracture. The radius is one of the long bones in your forearm. It is usually broken when you fall on an outstretched arm.

## What is a radial head or neck fracture?

A fracture to the radial head or neck are part of the elbow. The name of your injury depends on where you have damaged the radius, see the images below.



A radial fracture is usually a stable injury meaning the bones are not out of their usual position and a splint or cast is not needed.

Instead, you will be fitted with a collar and cuff sling or a broad arm sling. Both types will support your elbow in a more comfortable position.

Any X-rays taken while you are in the Emergency Department will be looked at by our radiologists. If there is any concern that there may be a more serious injury, you will be contacted. Please make sure that the receptionist has your up-to-date contact details.

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**GHPI1478\_08\_24**

Department

**Emergency/  
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## Looking after your elbow

You can expect your elbow and arm to be bruised and painful. You will also have some swelling.

During the first 72 hours, using ice packs on the injured area for 10 to 15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours will help to reduce any swelling and discomfort. Please read our 'Ice and Heat treatment GHPI0659' leaflet for further details. You can ask staff in the Emergency Department for a copy or visit [www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/ice-and-heat-treatment/](http://www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/ice-and-heat-treatment/)

We also recommend that you take regular pain relief such as paracetamol. For other pain relief options, please discuss with your local pharmacist.

Some people choose to sleep in their collar and cuff but if you have a broad arm sling, this must be removed when you sleep.

During the day, it is important to take off which ever support you have, so you are able to exercise your arm to prevent any neck or shoulder problems.

## Exercises to do to help your recovery

After injuring your elbow, it is important to gently begin to do the following exercise. This will prevent the joints in your arm becoming stiff or inflexible.

You should complete the exercise on the following page as comfort allows starting from the day of your injury.

You need to move gently through the full range of movement for your shoulder, wrist and finger joints at least 4 times a day. This will help prevent any delays in returning to your normal activities.

At first remove the sling and gently roll your shoulder both forwards and backwards. You should then push your chest forward with your arms slightly behind you.

Move your neck from side to side as if trying to slowly put your ear onto your shoulder. Repeat this 10 times slowly in each direction.

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Wriggle your fingers and wrists as though typing. Then using your good hand to support your sore arm, try to bend then straighten your arm as pain allows. Repeat these movements at mealtimes and gradually increase as you are able.

## Returning to your usual activities

As with any injury requiring a splint or sling, you should check with your insurance company before returning to driving.

Radial fractures almost always heal well with time and use. No specific treatment is needed so follow up appointments are not necessary.

Your symptoms may take 3 to 6 weeks to settle, but it can take several months for the elbow to feel normal again. Avoid sports for at least 6 weeks.

## Contact information

If you have any concerns or you have increasing pain in your arm, despite taking regular pain relief, please contact NHS 111 or the Trauma Service for advice.

### NHS 111

Tel: 111

### Trauma Service

Tel: 0300 422 5269

Monday to Friday, 10:00am to 2:00pm

Email: [ghn-tr.glostrauma@nhs.net](mailto:ghn-tr.glostrauma@nhs.net)

### NHS Inform

[www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints/fractures/elbow-radial-head-or-neck-fracture/](http://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints/fractures/elbow-radial-head-or-neck-fracture/)

### Physiotherapy

If you would like to self-refer to see a physiotherapist, please visit:

[www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk/our-services/services-we-offer/physiotherapy/how-can-i-see-physiotherapist/](http://www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk/our-services/services-we-offer/physiotherapy/how-can-i-see-physiotherapist/)

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## Making a choice

### Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



### Ask 3 Questions

**To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.**

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

\* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>