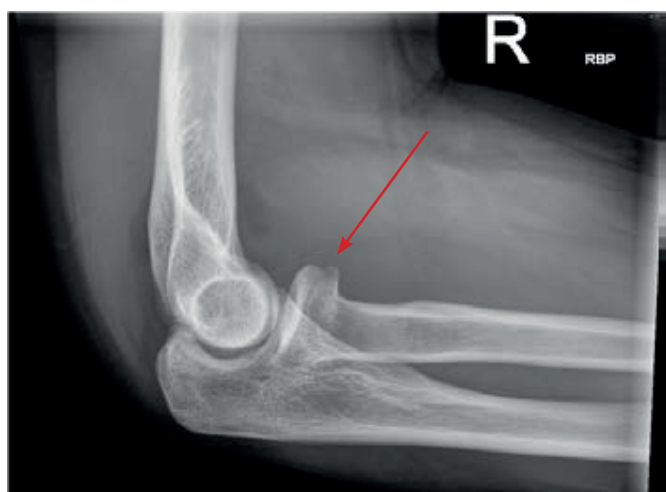


# Radial head fracture

Your Emergency Department doctor has referred you to the Virtual Fracture Clinic. This allows fast access to a specialist opinion without having to visit the hospital in person.

An orthopaedic doctor will review your case, then a physiotherapist will contact you by telephone to discuss your management plan.

## Your diagnosis is radial head fracture



You have a very small break in your radial head, which is one of the bones in your elbow.

This type of injury usually heals without any problems. Symptoms are usually minor but can take three to six weeks to subside. A sling may be provided for your comfort. You should gradually reduce the time you use the sling for as your pain settles and aim to remove the sling completely as soon as you feel able to.

## Early management: the first three days after the injury

It is normal for your elbow to become bruised and swollen. This will settle over a few weeks. The following guidelines can help to minimise swelling and pain:

### Rest

Rest for the first few days and avoid any activity that increases your pain.

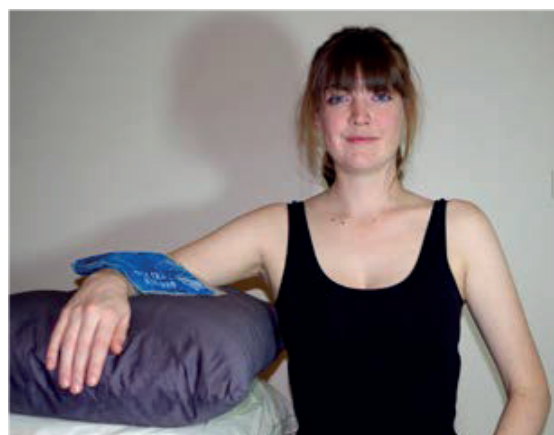
A sling may be provided to hold your elbow in a comfortable position, try to rest your arm in the sling.

### Ice

Ice the elbow for **20 minutes every 1-2 hours**. Use an ice pack or a bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in wet tea-towel. Continue this for **3 to 7 days** after your injury.

### Elevate

Sit and rest your arm on several pillows for **10 minutes** and move your fingers.



## Sling

Wear your sling to support the arm for **3 to 7 days**.

The sling can be removed for showers and sleeping when comfortable.



## Lifting

For the first **6 weeks** you should not lift objects heavier than a cup of tea or mobile phone (**250 grams**).

## Medication

Simple medication such as paracetamol or anti-inflammatories may help to control your pain. Speak with your local doctor (GP) or pharmacist about your medication options.

## Smoking

Research shows that smoking increases the risk of poor healing in fractures. Stopping smoking will improve the chance of a good outcome. For further information on quitting smoking visit [www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au) or speak with your GP.

## Rehabilitation: After the first few days

Start coming out of the sling as you are able, movement is important to allow the fracture to heal and the elbow not to stiffen.

## Hand and wrist exercises



Open and close your hand – **repeat 10 times**.

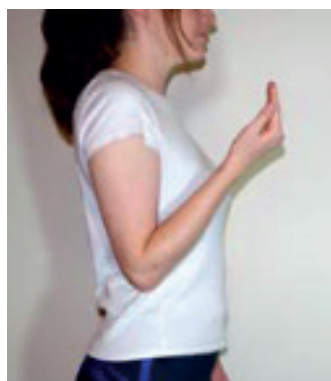
Progression: Hold a soft ball or ball of socks. Squeeze and relax – **repeat 10-15 times**.



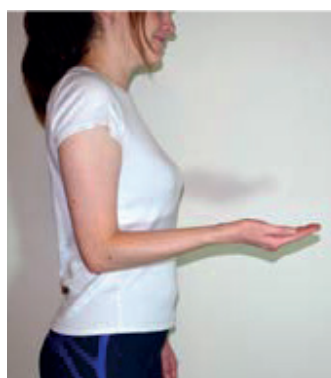
Move your wrist up and down – **repeat 10-15 times**.

## After one week

Start elbow range of motion exercises. Early movement of your elbow is important to help reduce stiffness. Follow the exercises below within your pain limits. Please note that forcible stretching is unnecessary and is likely to cause pain and delay your recovery.



**Elbow bend and straighten:** bend and straighten your elbow so you feel a mild to moderate stretch. Use your other hand to help if necessary. Do not push into pain – **repeat 10 to 15 times**.



**Forearm rotations:** with your elbow bent to 90 degrees by your side, rotate your palm up and down so you feel a mild to moderate stretch – **repeat 10-15 times**.

## Physiotherapy

If you don't have your normal movement back after three weeks, speak with the Virtual Fracture Clinic or your local doctor (GP) about physiotherapy options available to you.

## Expected return to daily activities

It is important to note that different people recover from injuries at different rates. Most simple fractures will heal in 6-12 weeks.

## Driving

You can return to driving 6 weeks following your injury, provided your arm strength is restored and you are able to lift your arm without pain.

## Return to work

The amount of time you will need off work relates to the severity of your injury and your work requirements. Discuss your return to work plan with your local doctor and employer.

As a guide:

- Manual workers - If you need to climb ladders or do repetitive lifting it may take 6 to 8 weeks to return to normal duties.
- Desk workers - you can return as soon as your pain allows.

## Return to sport

You should be able use the arm in normal day-to-day activities, pain-free before you consider returning to sport. If you are unable to do this or need further guidance please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic on 0448 193 644 about a physiotherapy referral.

## Longer-term recovery and expectations

Most people achieve a normal function 3 months after this injury. It is possible that you could have mild ongoing discomfort and stiffness (a loss of about 10 degrees of elbow extension is considered normal).

If you still have significant pain or limitation 3 months after your injury despite physiotherapy and rehabilitation you may need to see an orthopaedic specialist. Discuss this with your local doctor.

We do not routinely follow up patients with this type of injury as it usually heals well. However, if you are still experiencing significant symptoms after six weeks, please contact the virtual fracture clinic either by phone or email.

## When to contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic

- If you have not heard from us within three working days after your Emergency Department visit.
- If your pain is so bad that medication and RICE (rest, ice, compression and elevation) do not help.
- If you notice increasing pain without a cause after it was improving.
- If you notice major numbness, pins and needles, or changes in circulation in your arm, hand or fingers.
- If your symptoms are still bad after 6 weeks.

**If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic:**

**T: 0448 193 644**

**E: [myfracture@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:myfracture@health.qld.gov.au)**

This fact sheet provides some information to assist with management and rehabilitation of your injury. While it contains the recommended information, it does not contain all available information about your injury and is not a substitute for specific advice from the Virtual Fracture Clinic in respect of your injury.

All treatment options have risks and benefits. This advice is of a general nature and is appropriate for most patients with this condition. However, it may not apply to your specific injury and circumstances.

If you have any concerns about progress of your rehabilitation, contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic promptly.

Do not continue the exercises in the brochure if:

- You experience increasing pain that does not settle quickly with rest (some discomfort is common)
- Your condition has deteriorated in any way since you last consulted the Virtual Fracture Clinic
- You have a new injury or condition and have not consulted the Virtual Fracture Clinic about it.

This information is only designed for patients who are currently being treated by the Virtual Fracture Clinic at the Townsville University Hospital. If you do not understand the information seek clarification from the Virtual Fracture Clinic.

Patients should be aware that the suggested management is not guaranteed to provide any improvement in your condition.

Keep this brochure as you may need to read it again. Thank you to the Royal Melbourne Hospital VFC for their assistance.



Partnering with Consumers - This patient information brochure supports National Safety and Quality Health Service Standard 2. Consumers and/or carers provided feedback on this patient information.



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