

Radial head or neck fracture

There are many terms you may have heard to describe your injury. The common ones are fracture, break and crack – they all mean the same thing.

When you have a fracture not just the bone is affected, you will also have injured some of the soft tissues around it. Soft tissues include the muscles, ligaments, tendons and nerves.



Recovery Times

Most of the healing happens between 3-6 weeks

It is not unusual to have aches and discomfort beyond this, often when you do activities you haven't done for a while. Sometimes the area is more sensitive for months and this is normal.

Things that could affect your recovery

Smoking

Smoking slows fracture healing times. In some people, it can stop healing altogether. Smoking affects all your tissues; stopping smoking during the healing phase of your fracture will help ensure the best recovery.

For help to stop smoking see <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/stopping-smoking>

General Health

Some medical conditions may slow down the healing e.g. diabetes

Eating a healthy diet and keeping yourself active will help your recovery

Medication

Some medications you are already taking can slow down fracture healing. If you have concerns about your medication talk to a health professional.

Anti-inflammatory medication has been shown to delay healing.

What to expect

This fracture stable and you can move your joint without causing damage. At first your elbow will feel stiff and painful, but it is important to continue to move it. Even if it hurts.

- You may be given a collar and cuff or sling, for pain relief only. It is important that you reduce the use of this as your pain improves to prevent your elbow stiffening. The aim is to stop wearing this support as soon as possible, ideally within a week.

Pain

It is normal to have some discomfort in the areas around your fracture. The areas affected can be:

- Other soft tissues
- Nearby joints
- Areas which have been immobilised

Pain changes from day to day, it doesn't always depend on what you are doing. It is not unusual to have pain at rest. It is normal to have some pain even when your fracture has healed

Should I take painkillers after a fracture? Click on this link for advice about painkillers (<https://cks.nice.org.uk/analgesia-mild-to-moderate-pain#!scenario>)

Swelling

Swelling is the start of healing. It is normal to have it near the fracture first. It often spreads down your arm.

The amount of swelling changes with your position, activity or the time of day.

Even when your fracture has healed it is normal to have some swelling and this can last for months

How can I help the swelling?

- Raise your arm above your heart when you are resting.
- Keep the other joints in your arm, such as your shoulder and wrist moving normally
- Avoid too much rest and too much activity
- You can massage the swelling

Having a lot of swelling can become uncomfortable or limit your movement.

Bruising

It is normal to have bruising. Bruising can be widespread and appear a long way from your fracture. It changes colour as it recovers and can be very purple to start with.

Getting back to normal activities

Driving

It is your responsibility to make sure that you are always in full control of your vehicle.

Your injury may affect your insurance and you should contact your insurer before driving.

Once you are out of your sling the general advice is you must be able to safely perform an emergency stop or manoeuvre.

Work

Your return to work will depend on the type of work you do and your employer. It may be possible to discuss a phased return to work, changed duties etc. You don't need to see a health care professional to return to work.

Daily Activities

Keep doing any activities you are able, as your pain allows. Gradually increase what you do. Reduced flexibility and strength may make things more difficult to start with. This will get better as you slowly build up to all your usual activities. It can take 6 weeks for this fracture to fully heal. During this time, do not stress the joint with heavy lifting or weight bearing.

Do not return to contact sports until you are pain free with movement and at least 6 weeks after injury

Mood

Frustration or low mood after your injury is normal, as you get back to normal life this will get better.

Falls

Loss of confidence is common after a fracture; here are some links that may help:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/falls>

<https://www.csp.org.uk/publications/get-and-go-guide-supplement-six-exercises-staying-steady>

Bone scanning

You may be sent a letter inviting you for a scan of your bone density. This is routine if you fit the criteria and is nothing to worry about.

Exercises for your Elbow

It is safe to follow the exercises below for your injured elbow . Timescales for this are below.

<disclaimer>

Weeks	Plan
0-2wks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Maintain your shoulder wrist and hand movements✓ Increase movement in your elbow with gentle exercises✓ Manage you pain and swelling
2-6wks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Continue your elbow exercises, making sure you are aiming for full movement.✓ You should pay particular attention to straightening your elbow and turning you palm upwards. You can add gentle pressure from your other hand to stretch out these movements.
6-12wks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Return to full function/resume normal day to day activity✓ Return to higher impact activity

Exercises to regain elbow movement after your injury

It is important to start exercises as soon as possible, for recovery and to regain normal function. Consider other parts of your arm, for example – fingers, wrist and shoulder. There is nothing wrong with them so do not let them stiffen as well. Keep all parts moving.

Exercises should be practiced every three to five minutes every hour. Better to do little and often, than once a day for a longer period.

The elbow does four movements – it turns your hand palm up and palm down. It can straighten and can bend so your hand touches your shoulder.

Exercise 1: Practice taking your hand towards your shoulder and then straightening out as much as you can.



Exercise 2: Turn your palm upwards and then downwards

