

Patella fracture



Summary points to remember:

- Use this link or QR code to watch a video about a patella fracture: thermh.org.au/vfc
- The patella (knee cap) is a small bone at the front of your knee. Patella fractures are usually caused by a direct blow to the knee or a fall
- Wear your knee splint for six weeks
- This brochure provides some information to assist with the 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
- If you have any concerns about the progress of your rehabilitation, contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic promptly
- Do not continue the exercises in the brochure if:
 - You experience increasing pain (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 Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH)
- 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



Virtual Fracture Clinic

The Virtual Fracture Clinic gives fast access to a specialist orthopaedic opinion without having to visit the RMH in person.

An orthopaedic surgeon will review your case and a staff member will contact you to discuss your management plan.

Your diagnosis is: patella fracture (broken kneecap)

The patella (knee cap) is a small bone at the front of your knee.

Patella fractures are usually caused by a direct blow to the knee or a fall.

Stable patella fractures do not usually require surgery. Your doctor will determine this based on the fracture pattern.



Early management: the first 72 hours

It is normal for your knee to become bruised and swollen. This will settle over a few weeks. Follow the RICE (rest, ice, compression, elevation) guidelines to help with any pain and swelling:

Rest: Spend most of your time lying down, resting. Avoid any activity that increases your pain, such as long walks or standing for a long time.

Ice: Ice your knee for **20 minutes every one to two hours**. Use an ice pack, bag of frozen vegetables or crushed ice wrapped in a towel. Do not place ice directly on your skin. Continue for **three to 10 days** after your injury.

Compression: Wear a compression bandage or Tubigrip (an elastic stocking you can buy at the pharmacy) on your knee. If you experience pins and needles, numbness or skin colour changes, loosen the compression as it may be too tight.

Elevation: Position your knee higher than your heart.

Splint / brace

You will be fitted with a Zimmer Knee Splint (knee brace) to stop the knee from bending while the fracture heals. Wear the splint for six weeks.

You may remove the splint for showers but the leg must remain straight at all times.

The splint can be removed for sleeping after four weeks, if comfortable.

Wear your splint as shown in this picture – your kneecap should sit in the hole in the middle.



Walking

It is safe to put your full weight on your leg while wearing the brace (the medical term for this is 'weight bear as tolerated'). Use crutches to reduce your pain or assist your balance, if needed.

Medication

Simple medication such as paracetamol or NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) may help to control your pain. Speak with your General Practitioner (GP, also called your local doctor or family doctor) or pharmacist about 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 quitnow.gov.au or speak with your GP.

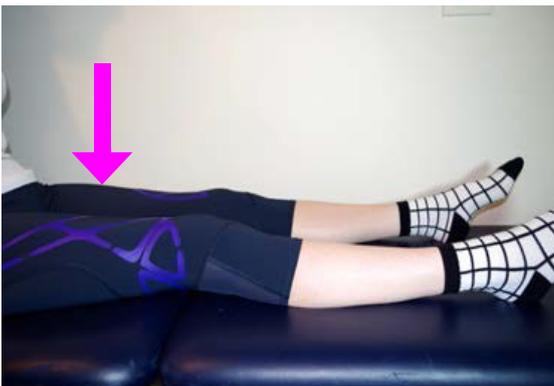
Rehabilitation exercises: after 48-72 hours

Perform these exercises **four times a day with your brace on:**

- Point your foot up and then down. Repeat 10 times

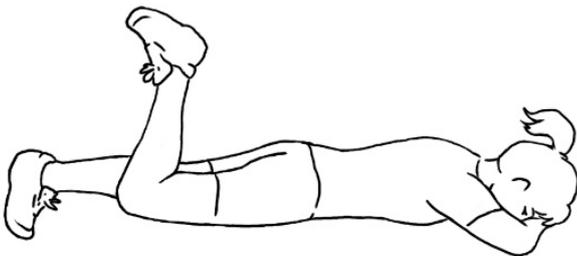


- Tense the muscle at the front of the thigh to push the knee into the bed. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times



After three weeks add this exercise

- Remove your brace. Lie on your front. Bend and straighten the injured leg by lifting your heel toward your bottom as far as comfortable. Repeat 10 times



After four weeks add these exercises

- Remove your brace. Bend and straighten the injured leg by sliding your foot up and down as far as comfortable. Repeat 10 times



- Remove your brace. Sit in a chair. Bend and straighten your knee. Hold for three seconds in each position. Repeat 10 times



Physiotherapy

Most patients will benefit from physiotherapy treatment following a knee injury.

Speak with your GP about physiotherapy options in your area, or contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic to arrange physiotherapy at the hospital.

Expected return to daily activities

Different people recover from injuries at different rates.

Return to driving

- Automatic car
 - If your **left** knee is fractured you may return to driving immediately
 - If your **right** knee is fractured you may return to driving after six weeks when you no longer need the splint **and** your right leg has enough strength to perform an emergency stop
- Manual car
 - You may return to driving six weeks when you no longer need the splint **and** your right leg has enough strength to perform an emergency stop

Return to work

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

As a guide:

- Manual workers: If you need to walk on uneven ground or climb it may take eight weeks to return to normal duties
- Desk workers: You can return as soon as your pain allows.

Return to sport

It is recommended that you see a physiotherapist for a guided return-to-sport program.

Longer term recovery and expectations

Most people achieve a normal function after this injury. It is possible that you could have mild ongoing discomfort or limp.

If you still have significant pain or limitation **three to six months** after your injury despite physiotherapy and rehabilitation you may need a review with an orthopaedic specialist. Discuss this with your GP.

Future appointments

Most people with a patella fracture will have a check X-ray after six weeks.

Please contact us if you do not receive notification of this appointment.

Contact

Contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic if:

- You have not heard from us **two working days** after your Emergency Department visit
- Your pain is so bad that medication and RICE (rest, ice, compression and elevation) do not help
- You notice increasing pain without a cause after it was improving
- You notice major numbness, pins and needles, or changes in circulation in your foot or ankle
- Your symptoms are still bad after six weeks

Contact

Virtual Fracture Clinic
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Practitioner / Patient notes

