

# Proximal Humerus Fracture

## Summary Points to Remember

- Wear the sling for **6 weeks**
- Lifting restrictions for **12 weeks**
- Do not drive for **6-12 weeks**

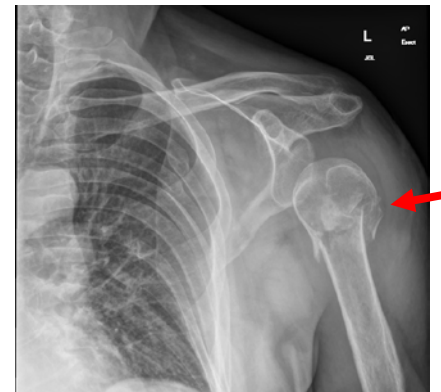
## Virtual Fracture Clinic

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.

A Specialist Orthopaedic Surgeon will review your case, then a staff member will contact you by telephone to discuss your management plan.

### Your diagnosis is: Proximal humerus fracture

The proximal humerus is the upper part of the arm bone, close to the shoulder joint. In young adults, fractures of the proximal humerus are often caused by high-energy trauma such as a sports injury or car accident. In the older population they are usually caused by a fall.



### Early Management: 0-72 hours after the injury

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

#### Rest

For the first few days and avoid any activity that increases your pain

#### Ice

Ice the shoulder for **20 minutes every 1-2 hours**. Use an ice pack or a bag of frozen vegetables (do not place ice directly on the skin). Continue this for **3 to 7 days** after your injury

#### Sling:

- The emergency department will apply a 'collar and cuff' sling to support the arm in the best position for healing (see photo).  
**Your elbow should be bent at 90 degrees in the sling.**

- Wear the sling at all times for **6 weeks** (you may remove it to wash, but keep your arm still by your body).
- If you are uncomfortable lying flat, try sleeping in a recliner or placing a pillow lengthways behind the injured side of your body to support your arm



### Lifting:

- For the first **3 weeks** you should not lift anything at all with the injured arm
- From **week 3-6** you can lift light items such as a cup of tea or mobile phone (**less than 250 grams**)
- From **week 6-12** only lift objects less than **5 kilograms**
- **After 12 weeks** it is safe to gradually return to normal lifting

### 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 48-72 hours

#### Exercises:

Gently perform the following exercises **4 times a day**

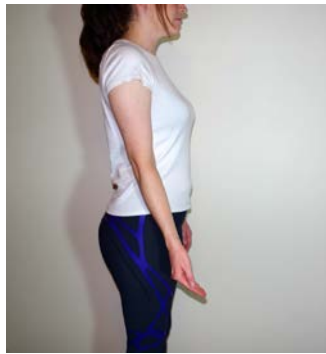
- Shoulder shrugs – Lift your shoulders up towards your ears and then slowly relax - repeat 10 times then slowly relax – Repeat 10 times



- Shoulder retraction – squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for 5 seconds



- Elbow bend and straighten – bend and straighten your elbow so you feel a mild to moderate stretch. You can use your other hand to help if necessary. Do not push into pain – repeat 10-15 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



- Hand and wrist exercises

- Open and close your hand – repeat 10 times

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

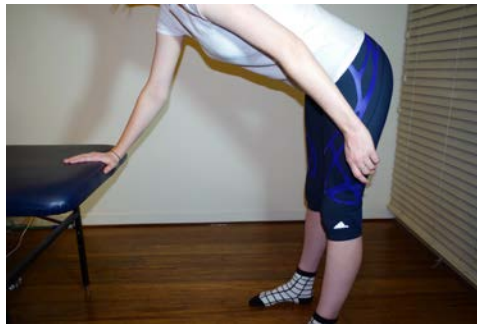


- Move your wrist up and down – repeat 10-15 times



**After 2 weeks** start shoulder pendulum exercises

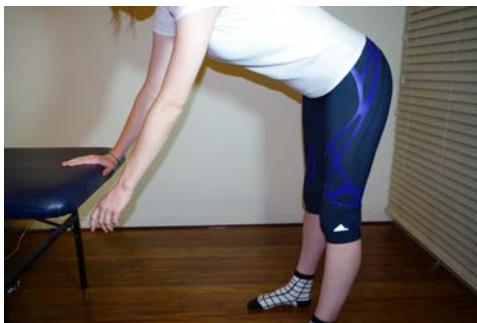
- Lean forward supporting yourself with the other hand. Relax your injured arm and let it hang down. Gently swing the arm:
  - In circles - Repeat 10 times each direction



- Side to side - Repeat 10 times each direction

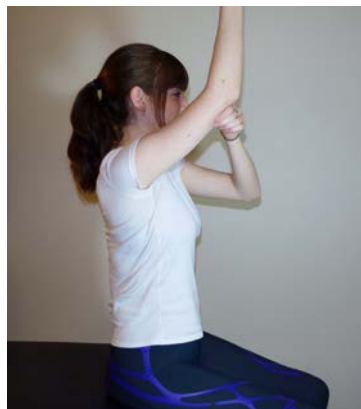


- Front and back - Repeat 10 times each direction



## After 4 weeks – start active assisted exercises

- Shoulder flexion - use your other hand to lift your arm up to the front – repeat 10 times



- Assisted shoulder external rotations – Keep the elbow of your injured arm tucked into your side. Hold on to an umbrella / stick / broom handle and use this to push the injured hand outwards until you feel a mild to moderate stretch. Hold for 5 seconds repeat 10 times



## Physiotherapy:

Most people would benefit from physiotherapy treatment following a fracture in the shoulder area.

- Speak with your local doctor (GP) about physiotherapy options in your area **or**;
- Contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic to arrange physiotherapy at the hospital (Medicare Bulk billed)

## Expected return to daily activities

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

## Driving:

You can return to driving 6-12 weeks following your injury, provided your arm strength is restored. Your doctor or physiotherapist can assess this.

## 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 **3-4 months** 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.

### **Future Appointments**

Most people will have a check Xray **1 week** following the injury to monitor the healing.

**Please contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic if you have not been notified of this appointment.**

### **Longer term recovery and expectations**

Most people with a proximal humerus fracture have long-term shoulder stiffness and difficulty fully lifting the arm. The main aim of rehabilitation is to regain enough movement to return to your usual daily activities. Full recovery can take 9-12 months.

If you still have significant pain or limitation 3-6 months after your injury despite physiotherapy and rehabilitation you may need to see an orthopaedic specialist. Discuss this with your local doctor.



## When to contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic

- **If you have not heard from us TWO 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

This brochure 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 the majority of patients with this condition. However, it may not apply 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 (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. 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.

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

Department of Orthopaedic Surgery | iPolicy [ORT03.01B](#) Number | Virtual Fracture Clinic Coordinator | Reviewed March 2020



MELBOURNE HEALTH



The information contained in this brochure is for educational purposes only and is not intended as a substituted for consultation with a doctor or health care professional