

# Shaft of humerus fracture



## Summary points to remember:

- The shaft of the humerus is the long section of the upper arm bone. Fractures of the shaft are most common in the middle third
- Wear your sling for six weeks
- Wear your Sarmiento brace until 12 weeks after your injury
- 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: shaft of humerus fracture

The shaft of the humerus is the long section of the upper arm bone. Fractures of the shaft are most common in the middle third.

In young adults fractures of the humerus are often caused by high-energy trauma like a sports injury or car accident.

In the older population they are usually caused by a fall.

## Early management: the first 72 hours

It is normal for your arm to become bruised and swollen. This will settle over a few weeks.

Follow these guidelines to help with pain and swelling:

**Rest:** Avoid any activity that increases your pain.

**Ice:** Ice your arm 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. Protect your plaster from getting wet.



## Sling

The Emergency Department will apply a 'hanging U slab' and collar and cuff sling (see photo below left) to support the fracture.

Wear the hanging U slab at all times for the first one to two weeks. After this you will have an appointment to have a Sarmiento brace fitted (see photo below right).



Wear the sling to support the arm for the **first six weeks**.

Wear the Sarmiento brace at all times **until 12 weeks after your injury**, including when sleeping.

The brace may be removed with assistance for hygiene.

## Lifting

For the **first six weeks** after your injury (weeks one to six) do not lift anything in your injured arm.

For the **following six weeks** (weeks seven to 12) you can lift objects weighing up to **250 grams** (such as a mobile phone or cup of tea).

## 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 after a fracture. Stopping smoking will improve the chance of a good outcome.

For further information on quitting smoking visit [quitnow.gov.au](http://quitnow.gov.au) or speak with your GP.

## Rehabilitation exercises: after 48-72 hours

Remove the sling but keep your plaster/brace on and perform these exercises four times a day:

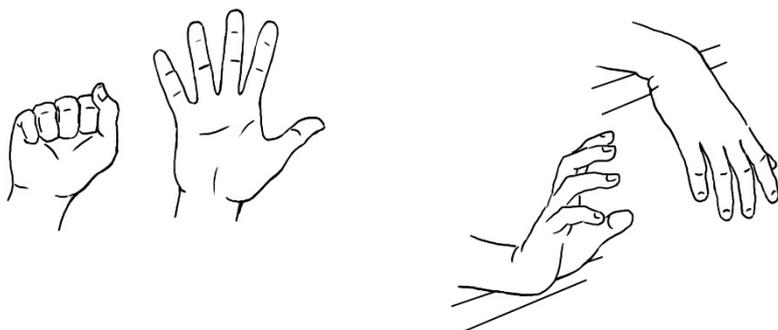
- Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears and then down. Repeat 10 times



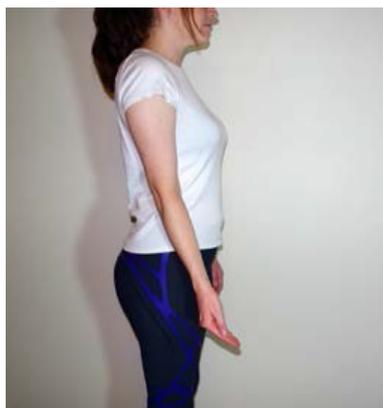
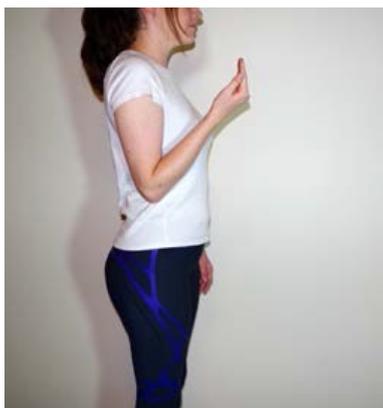
- Squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for five seconds then rest. Repeat 10 times



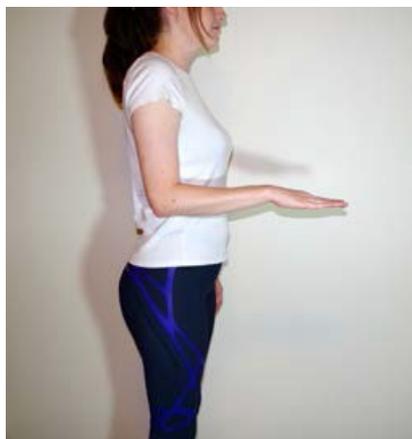
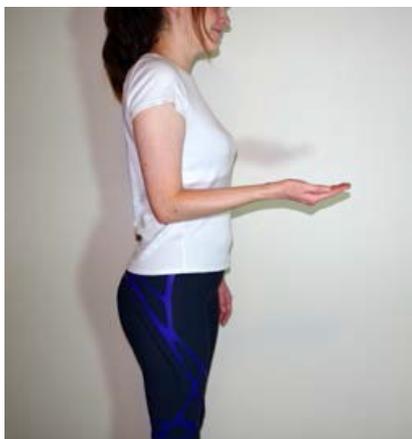
- Open and close your hand, and move your wrist up and down. Repeat 10 times each



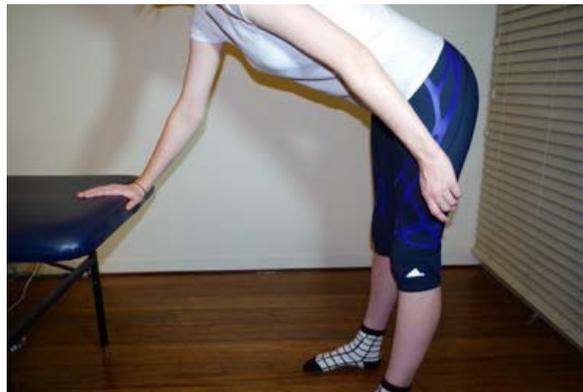
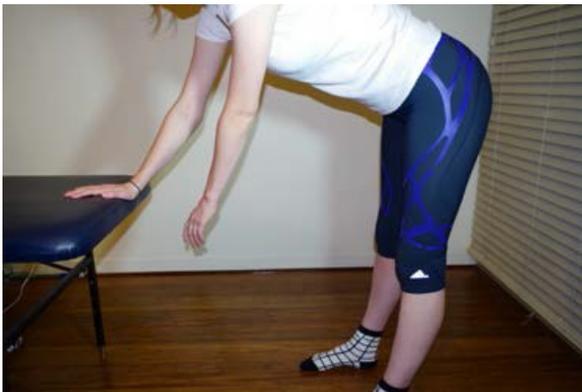
- Bend and straighten your elbow. Use your good arm to help if needed. Repeat 10 times



- Start with your elbow bent to 90 degrees by your side. Rotate your palm up and down to feel a mild stretch. Repeat 10 times



- Lean forward supporting yourself with your good arm. Hang your injured arm down. Gently swing the injured arm:
  - In circles
  - Front to back
  - Side to sideRepeat 10 times each direction



**After four weeks, start 'active assisted' exercises – keep your brace on**

- Use your good arm to lift your injured arm to shoulder height (90 degrees) only:
  - To the front
  - To the sideRepeat 10 times each direction



### After six weeks add rotation exercises – keep your brace on

- Stand with your elbow bent to 90 degrees and tucked into your side. Use an umbrella or stick to rotate the injured arm outwards. Hold for five seconds. Repeat 10 times



## Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy rehabilitation is important after a fracture

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

## Expected return to daily activities

Different people recover from injuries at different rates.

### Return to driving

You can return to driving three to four months after your injury provided your doctor has told you to stop wearing the brace **and** your arm strength is restored.

### 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 GP and employer.

As a guide:

- Manual workers: If you need to climb ladders or do repetitive lifting it may take three to four 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

You will have check X-rays and reviews at the following time points:

- Two weeks after your injury: Change to brace and check X-ray (phone review)
- Six weeks after your injury: Check X-ray (phone review)
- Three months after your injury: Check X-ray and in-person review

**Please contact us if you do not receive notification of these appointments.**

## Longer term recover and expectations

Many people will have long-term shoulder stiffness after a shaft of humerus fracture. Most people will regain enough movement to return to their usual daily activities. Full recovery can take nine to 12 months.

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

## 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 hand or arm
- Your symptoms are still bad after six weeks

### Contact

**Virtual Fracture Clinic**  
0427 892 421

### Practitioner / Patient notes

