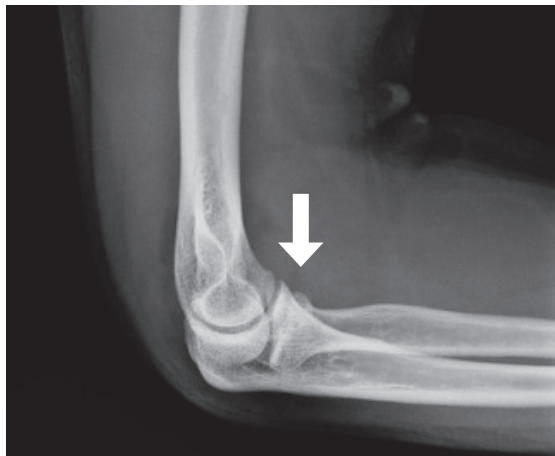


Radial head or neck fracture

Information and exercise sheet

What is a radial head or neck fracture?

It is a small break or fracture in your radial head or the adjacent radial neck, which is one of the bones at your elbow. It is commonly injured following a fall.



Case courtesy of Antonio Rodrigues de Aguiar Neto, Radiopaedia.org, rID: 87275

What to expect

This type of injury usually heals without any problems. Symptoms are usually minor but can take 3 to 6 weeks to disappear. Most people will be able to use their arm normally by 3 months. Some people may have mild ongoing discomfort and stiffness after this period. Please see your GP if you have ongoing concerns at 6 weeks.

For the first 6 weeks you should not lift more than a cup of tea or mobile phone in the affected arm.

What can you do to help your recovery?

You will be fitted with a sling to support your arm. Wear your sling for 1 to 2 weeks. Wearing a sling can help with the pain early on. You can take it off for showering and sleeping. It is important to keep gently moving the elbow after 7 days.

Gradually start your normal daily activities, this will reduce stiffness and help with your recovery.

✓ DO R.I.C.E

To help with your recovery, it is best to follow the 'RICE' principle. Do this over the **first 3-7 days**.

- **Rest:** avoid activities that significantly increase your pain.
- **Ice:** cooling an injury helps to reduce both pain and swelling. Apply ice to the injury for 20 minutes every 2 hours when awake. Wrap ice or a cold pack in a tea towel to protect your skin and remove it if it is too cold, to prevent ice burn.
- **Compression:** apply with tubigrip, a wrap bandage or compression stocking. Ensure the bandage does not increase pain or restrict blood flow. Monitor for new colour changes, discolouration of the hand and fingers or new pins and needles and numbness.
- **Elevate:** your arm as much as possible during the day.

✗ AVOID H.A.R.M

To help with your recovery, avoid 'HARM' for the **first 7 days**.

- **Heat:** increases blood flow and swelling to the elbow.
- **Alcohol:** increases blood flow and swelling. You may also be more likely to reinjure the elbow.
- **Re-Injury:** protect your elbow until it heals adequately. Avoid sports until advised by a health professional.
- **Massage:** can slow the healing if it is started too early.

Pain management

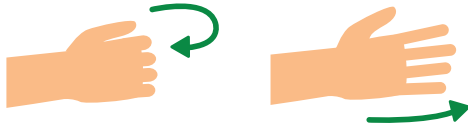
Pain relieving medication may also be recommended in the early phases of recovery. Ask your health professional for further advice.

Exercises - straight away

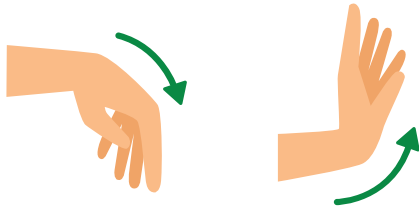
Start these exercises **straight away**. Repeat each movement **10 times**. Do the whole exercise program **4 to 5 times a day**.

Hand/wrist exercises:

- Open and close your hand, squeeze for 3 seconds and relax.



- Move your wrist up and down.



Exercises - after one week

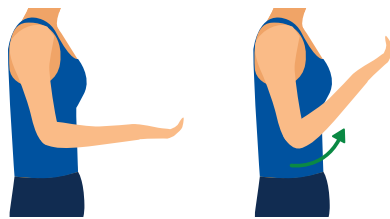
Elbow:

After one week, start to move your elbow, this will help with stiffness. Complete the below exercises within your limits of pain. Forced stretching is not helpful for your recovery.

- Bending/straightening

While sitting with the injured arm by your side and the palm facing you use your other hand to bend/ straighten your elbow.

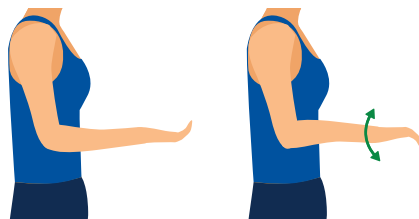
Repeat 10 times, 3 times a day.



- Forearm rotation

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 times, 3 times a day.



What to watch out for

See your GP (General Practitioner) urgently or go to the emergency department, if:

- your pain is so bad that medication and RICE do not help.
- increasing pain without a cause
- you notice major numbness, pins and needles, or changes in circulation in your arm, hand, or fingers.
- see your GP if your symptoms are still bad after 6 weeks.

Follow up

It is important to attend recommended follow up appointments to guide your healing and recovery.

These appointments may include:

- General Practitioner (GP or doctor)
- Orthopaedic or fracture clinic
- Outpatient hospital physiotherapy
- Private practice physiotherapist.

Seeking help

Please see a health care professional or attend your nearest emergency department if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- neurovascular concerns - constant tingling and numbness, changes of colour to the forearm or hand, worsening and unmanageable pain
- signs of infection - redness, heat, swollen, fevers, unwell.

For other general medical problems see your local doctor or healthcare professional. **13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)** provides health information, referral and teletriage services to the public in all parts of Queensland. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for the cost of a local call. In a medical emergency go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).