

Proximal Humerus Fracture

The aim of this leaflet is to give you information about a proximal humerus fracture, what to expect and what you can do to help.

What is it?

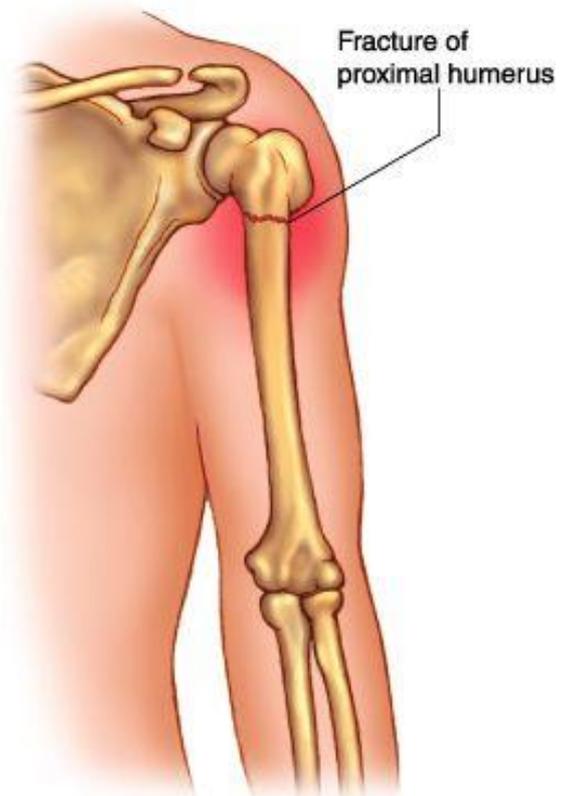
Your shoulder is a very mobile joint made up of your shoulder blade (scapula) and upper arm bone (humerus). A proximal humerus fracture occurs at the upper part of your humerus bone.

Why did it happen?

This type of fracture or break is often caused by falling on to your arm and can occur in any age group but more commonly in adults over 65.

Signs and symptoms:

- Pain
- Swelling
- Bruising
- Decreased movement of your shoulder



What should I expect?

You will be reviewed in fracture clinic, or your x-ray will be reviewed by a doctor in clinic soon after your injury and then again between 2-6 weeks later. If your bone is healing well, you may be discharged from the doctor, but you will be referred to physiotherapy which will continue for some time after.

This can be very painful especially in the first few weeks, usually with bruising of your arm, stiffness of your shoulder and sometimes elbow and hand.

How will it be treated?

Most humeral fractures do not need surgery, but it depends on the type. Sometimes surgery is required to fix the fracture or replace the joint. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

Sling

Most fractures involve a brief period of immobilisation, usually wearing a collar and cuff or sling for 2 to 3 weeks. You can start to wean yourself at this point unless told otherwise.

How can I manage my pain?

Regular pain relief is advised. If unsure, discuss with your clinician or pharmacist. It is common to get pain from your shoulder down into your arm.

Sleeping upright in bed can be helpful using your collar and cuff but **do not rest your arm on pillows in the early stages** unless told to do otherwise. Do not put weight through your arm or carry anything heavy.

Early rehab

Early mobilisation is important to prevent long term stiffness, reduce your pain and increase your function. This leaflet along with your physiotherapist / orthopaedic team will guide you.

The first 2 weeks of recovery should be based around comfort and completing hand, wrist and elbow movements to prevent stiffness. (See below)

We would encourage you to use the arm for light functional activities at the elbow such as using a knife and fork or doing up buttons of a shirt. Let pain guide you.

As the bone begins to heal, shoulder movements may be progressed after 2-3 weeks unless told otherwise. (See progressions below) Passive movements play a key role in avoiding shoulder stiffness at this time. It is important to continue regular medication and work consistently with your exercises for several months after your injury doing these regularly at home.

It can take 6 to 12 weeks for your fracture to heal, however your symptoms will likely continue for some time after. Some people do not regain full movement, but most people regain enough movement to perform functional day to day activities. This can often take 12-18 months

Physiotherapy

After leaving hospital or being seen in fracture clinic, you will be referred to physiotherapy. Allow your physiotherapist to guide your movements and activities. The physiotherapist may make changes to your exercises depending on your individual needs.

You may feel some mild discomfort during these exercises but if you feel a significant increase in pain then stop doing that particular exercise until you can seek advice from your physiotherapist.

Early exercises (first 0 - 2 weeks)



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Elbow movement

Bend and straighten your elbow 5-10 times, using the other hand to help if needed.



Elbow movement

Support your forearm and turn your palms up to face the ceiling and turn them down to face the floor as pain allows.

This movement should occur at your elbow and not your shoulder.



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Hand, wrist & finger movement

Move the wrist up and down.

Make a **full fist** and stretch your fingers **out wide**.

Later exercises: from 2 weeks unless you are advised otherwise

Again, all exercises must be performed within the limits of **tolerable pain**. Please do these exercises regularly at home, **nice and gently to start with**. Aim for at least **5 repetitions, 3 times per day**. **Do not force or stretch**. Continue to take regular painkillers.

Seated exercise



Sitting down.

Support your painful side with your opposite hand. Slide your hands down your thigh as far as is comfortable, return to the start position.



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Pendulum exercise

Resting your non-injured arm on a table, bend at the waist & let your painful arm hang forward.

Make a circular or forwards and backwards motion with your whole arm.



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Table walk aways

Rest your hands on the edge of sink or work top. Walk back until you feel discomfort. **Nice and gently to start with**.

You can **wash** under your **armpit** whilst the arm is supported.



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Tabletop slides

Sit or stand. Place your hands on a table on a towel or kitchen roll.

Start with the hand of your painful arm on top of your other hand to help it. Slide your hands along the table, reaching forwards and straighten your elbows as much as possible. Slide your hands back. **Do small movements to start with.**



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Hand behind back

Stand tall. Relax your shoulders. Place your hand on your buttocks and gently slide it along your back to the midline. Gently release to the starting position. Help with your other hand if you can.

Nice and gently to start with. Let pain be your guide



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External rotation with a stick

Sit or lie down with both elbows bent at right angles.

Place a rolled towel between your elbow and side if sitting down. Hold a stick with both hands.

Gently push the stick to move the hand outwards, keeping your elbow in at your side.



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Assisted shoulder flexion

Lying on your back, elbow bent. Clasp your hands or hold at your painful arm's wrist. Straighten your arms towards the ceiling.

If you can, you can take the arm overhead but only if it is comfortable.

Your physiotherapist will guide you but when you feel comfortable and confident with the above exercises, you may progress on to the following exercises but only do within limits of tolerable pain.



Assisted shoulder flexion using pulley

If able to and on discussion with the physiotherapist, you may find a pulley particularly useful to assist your movement. These can be bought in a shop or online and your physiotherapist will advise you



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Wall slides

Stand close to a wall with one foot forward. Bend your elbows and place your hands on the wall. Start by putting the hand of your painful arm on top of your other hand. Slide your arms up and down the wall assisting with your good arm.

SMOKING CESSATION

Evidence suggests that smoking can delay fracture healing times. In more extreme cases, it can prevent your fracture from healing at all. Stopping smoking during your rehab will likely aid in the fracture healing process.

For more details, please see below.

For further information

Contact details:

Fracture clinic RVI: 0191 282 21431

If you were an in-patient at the RVI: 0191 2821887

Physiotherapy

If you are a resident of Newcastle or Gateshead, TIMS will usually be your physiotherapy provider.

If you have a query about your first appointment with TIMS please contact their booking team on 0191 445 2643.

If you are a current TIMS patient and have a query about your follow-up appointment please contact their local admin team on 0191 2138800.

Otherwise contact your local physiotherapy service.

If your physiotherapy is with Newcastle Trust (RVI or Freeman), the contact is:

Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI)
Queen Victoria Road
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 4LP
0191 282 5484

Freeman Hospital
Freeman Road
High Heaton
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE7 7DN
0191 223 1024

PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) for help, advice and information about NHS services. You can contact them on freephone 0800 032 02 02, email northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk or text to 07815 500 015.

Useful websites

If you would like further information about health conditions and treatment options, you may wish to have a look at the NHS website at www.nhs.uk or the following <https://www.tims.nhs.uk/>

Versus arthritis website: <https://www.versusarthritis.org/>

For help with smoking cessation visit [Better Health – Quit Smoking](#)

If you would like to find accessibility information for our hospitals, please visit www.accessable.co.uk

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