

UNDISPLACED RADIAL HEAD OR NECK FRACTURES ADVICE SHEET

Overview

- The radial head and neck are parts of one of the forearm bones near your elbow, which is usually injured following a fall.
- Undisplaced fractures of the radial head and neck usually heal well and without significant complication, although commonly there is some mild stiffness in fully straightening out of the elbow which does not usually cause any functional issues
- The fracture takes about 6 weeks to heal to about two-thirds of its previous strength, but continues to strengthen over the next year.

Management

First 2-3 days

- Most of the pain will be worst over the first few days:
 - Wear a sling to rest and support the elbow
 - Ice for 20 minutes every few hours.
 - Wear a compression sleeve for comfort and to assist with swelling
 - Take simple pain relief as required
- Smoking can increase the time taken for injuries to heal and also increase the risk that the injury does not heal appropriately, so consider methods to cut back and quit.

From 3 days to 6 weeks

- Wean out of the sling as able
- Avoid lifting anything heavier than your mobile phone
- Do not put any weight through your hand / arm
- Commence gentle exercises within comfort levels
 - Complete each exercise for 3 lots of 20 times for each, at least 3 times per day
 - Continue until you have consistently maintained the same amount of movement as your uninjured side

Disclaimer: This health information is for general education purposes only and is intended to be a reminder of education provided by your health professional after a thorough examination.



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- Bend and straighten



- With elbow bent to 90 degrees and tucked into your side, turn palm as far up as possible and then turn palm down as far as possible



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- It is normal to have some stiffness in the elbow for several months after the injury
- If you are finding it slow or difficult to regain your flexibility in these exercises after 2-3 weeks, arrange to see a physiotherapist.
- Your GP may need to refer you to see a specialist if, despite adequate rehabilitation / physiotherapy, you have not regained near full range of motion or have significant pain by 3 months post injury

Driving

- You can generally return to driving once you have full range of motion and are safely able to firmly grip and turn the wheel without pain (or for a manual car change gears for a left elbow injury). This would usually be around the 4-6 week mark – consult with your treating clinicians for further advice.

Work

- Occupations not involving physical labour, such as computer work, can generally be resumed once comfort and function allows
- More strenuous occupations or activities which require lifting, pushing or manipulating objects will generally take at least 2 months before they be commenced
- Discuss with your doctor, physiotherapist and employer about an individualised return to work plan

Sport

- Once the bone has healed adequately, you will need to ensure that you have close to normal strength and flexibility prior to return to sport.
- Consult with a physiotherapist to guide progress

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