



## WHAT IS A RADIAL HEAD OR NECK FRACTURE?

The radius is one of two bones in the forearm that extend from the wrist to the elbow. A fracture of the radial head or neck is a break at the elbow end of the radius.

Radial head or radial neck fractures are the most common elbow fracture in adults. They are usually sustained from a fall onto an outstretched hand. The impact of the radial head into the articulating surface of the humerus breaks the bone.



Radial head fracture

## HOW IS RADIAL HEAD OR NECK FRACTURE TREATED?

Treatment of a radial head or neck fracture will depend on the severity of the fracture. Displaced fractures where the bone fragments have moved out of place, or comminuted fractures where the bone has broken into many small fragments usually require surgery to fix them into alignment. Non-displaced fractures (where the bone fragments are still in good alignment) can be managed without surgery as outlined below.



Radial neck fracture

## HOW IS RADIAL HEAD OR NECK FRACTURE TREATED?

It is not necessary to protect a simple (non-displaced) radial head or neck fracture in a splint or cast; in fact doing so is likely to lead to a very stiff elbow, however a sling may be worn for comfort for the first 1-2 weeks. Remove the sling for short periods as your pain settles, and aim to stop using it completely as soon as you feel able. Gradually resume light daily activities as pain allows.

## SWELLING MANAGEMENT

If you have significant swelling around your elbow your therapist will provide you with a compression sleeve to help reduce the swelling. Your therapist may also perform gentle massage to shift swelling away from the elbow.

## EXERCISE

Elbow joint stiffness is the most common complication following radial head fractures. In particular, full straightening (extension) of the elbow can be difficult to restore. For this reason, gentle active elbow exercises are started as soon as pain permits to minimise stiffness and facilitate healing. Once your fracture is healed, your hand therapist will provide you with exercises to strengthen your affected arm.

## PAIN RELIEVING MODALITIES

Our hand therapists provide a number of pain relieving treatments including moist heat treatment, massage and InterX neurostimulation.