

Patient Information Sheet – 2R1

Radial Head Fracture

What do I need to know?

What is my diagnosis?

You have fractured (broken) a small bone in the elbow called the **radial head**.

This type of injury is very common – hundreds of people have this injury each year in Lothian. Almost all of these injuries heal fully **without the need for any intervention or surgery**.



What happens next?

- Your X-rays and notes will be checked by a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon

If nothing further is needed, we will not contact you

- If any other treatment or assessment is needed we will contact you by telephone or post
- Please ensure the Emergency Department/Minor Injury Unit reception staff have your mobile and phone home numbers.

What can I expect during my recovery?

- The pain begins to settle after a week
- The injury will heal over the course of 6 weeks but you may have some aching for up to 3 months.
- You do not have to wear the sling. It is only used to provide comfort for a few days
- Regaining a full range of movement as soon as possible will speed up your recovery
- Perform the exercises on the next page as soon as your pain allows you to do so
- Most people return to desk work by **1 to 2 weeks**, but manual work, may not be possible for **4 to 6 weeks** depending on your symptoms
- There is **no specific time you can drive again**. It is **illegal** to drive when wearing a sling, splint, cast, or moonboot. As you recover, it is your legal responsibility to be certain before you return to driving that you are able to control your vehicle normally and safely.

Key exercises (three times a day)

Wrist, fingers and thumb

- As soon as you can, begin to move your wrist up and down and from side to side.
- Move your hand between making a fist to fully opened with the fingers splayed apart

Elbow bending and straightening

- Begin by gently bending and straightening your elbow within a range that is comfortable
- Once the pain begins to settle, use your other hand to gently stretch the elbow straight and then bend it up. Do not use too much force- just go until you feel a little discomfort.

Arm rotation

- With your elbows bent and arms by your side, rotate so your palms face the ceiling then the floor

What if I have a problem?

Very occasionally some patients have difficulties with ongoing pain or stiffness. If you have any issues beyond **three months** after injury please contact us on the details below.

Get in touch

Please get in touch via our trauma email if you have any queries about your injury:

traumaenquiriesRIE@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

Helpline Monday-Friday (8am – 4pm): 0131 242 3410

Urgent issues

Please call the department where you were initially seen about your injury:

- **RIE Minor Injuries Unit:** 0131 242 3942 (8am – midnight, if after midnight contact RIE Emergency Department 0131 242 1300)
- **WGH Minor Injuries Clinic:** 0131 536 3468 (9am – 8.30pm)
- **SJH Emergency Department:** 01506 523 011 (24 hours)

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