

# Midshaft Humerus (arm) Fractures

You have broken the bone of your upper arm which is called the Humerus. This is a painful injury and the following information will be helpful as you recover.

This information is on caring for your cast. **Read this information carefully before leaving the Orthopaedic clinic** and ask the staff about anything you are unsure of.

## Treatment

Your fractured humerus may be treated in a number of ways. Usually a special cast called a U-slab is applied. This cast fits over your shoulder and goes down to your elbow.

You will need to wear a collar and cuff sling to help support your wrist whilst still allowing your broken bone to mend. This collar and cuff sling is an important part of your treatment and must always be worn.

The aim of the treatment is to allow the weight of your arm to keep the bones correctly aligned whilst they heal. The U-slab cast and 'collar and cuff sling' will provide the support whilst the bone heals. **It is important to let your arm hang down in the 'collar and cuff sling'. It is also important that you do not rest your elbow on anything. This includes pillows.**

Your arm will be x-rayed on occasions in the weeks following your injury. This is to ensure that the bone is healing correctly. It may be necessary to change your U-slab cast as the swelling goes down. As healing occurs the U-slab cast will be changed to a 'Functional Humeral Brace'. This is a special lighter, more comfortable plastic splint that can be taken off for showering. Your arm will take approximately 6-10 weeks to heal.

## Pain relief

As this is a very painful injury it is important that you take pain medication frequently and correctly to help control your pain. We recommended that adults take a combination of:

- Paracetamol (Panadol) for pain and fever. 1 gram (2 tablets) every 4-6 hours. Do not exceed more than 4 grams (8 tablets) over a 24 hour period
- An anti-inflammatory medicine such as voltaren or neurofen morning and night time to reduce swelling

Please tell us if you are allergic to any medications or have any reason not to take these medications. A prescription should be provided for you to obtain pain relief medication. You can also buy the medicines from your local Pharmacy without a prescription.

## Exercises

In the first few weeks following your injury exercises should be kept to a minimum. The most important thing is to exercise your wrist. Your doctor will tell you when it is alright to start exercising your shoulder and elbow.

## Clothing

You should not try to put your arm into the sleeve of your clothing as excessive movement can cause the bones to move.

Loose baggy shirts and tops are ideal as you can place your arm inside the main body of the clothing.

When things have progressed and the bones are beginning to heal, you can wear your sling outside of your shirt/top. To put on your shirt/top you should follow these instructions:

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When putting on the shirt or top:

- Put the affected arm into the sleeve of your shirt or top. Move the shirt sleeve or top to above the elbow
- Put your head through the neck of the shirt or top
- Put the unaffected arm through the sleeve last

When removing the shirt or top:

- Remove the unaffected arm from the sleeve or top
- Take the shirt or top over your head
- You will then be able to slide the shirt or top down the affected side without difficulty

## Sporting activity

You should seek advice from your doctor before returning to sport as the risk of re-injury is high. It may take several months for your injury to heal enough to take part in contact sports.

## When should I seek help?

**Phone immediately** (Wellington Orthopaedic clinic / Kenepuru Outpatients during clinic hours or Emergency Dept if after hours) **if:**

- You develop numbness or tingling in your arm or hand
- You cannot move your arm or wrist
- You have severe or increasing pain which cannot be controlled with your pain relief
- Your cast slips off your shoulder
- Your brace is uncomfortable

## Follow-up appointments

It is important that you return for your follow-up appointments. You will be given an Orthopaedic clinic appointment where your injury and progress is reviewed. An x-ray will be taken to ensure that the bone is healing and in the correct place. This may be followed up with several appointments before you are discharged from the clinic.

### Contact us:

**Remember** If you do not have an appointment, always phone before coming to Orthopaedic clinic.

#### Wellington Hospital Orthopaedic Clinic

Phone (04) 385 5952 Fax (04) 385 5953

**Hours of opening:** Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 5.30pm

**Outside of these hours** please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department  
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

#### Kenepuru Hospital Outpatients

Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 7205

**Hours of opening:** Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 5pm

**Outside of these hours** please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department  
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

### Can't keep your outpatient appointment?

Please phone us on 0800 999 442 and let us know as soon as possible.