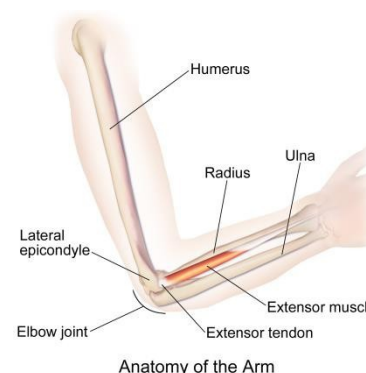


## Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient

### Department Information Following Your Elbow

#### Fracture

This information leaflet has been provided by the Physiotherapy department to assist you in returning back to normal following your elbow fracture. The following information will give you some advice and exercises to do while you wait to start your physiotherapy sessions. If you have any queries about the information provided in this leaflet, please call the Physiotherapy department Monday – Friday between 09.00 – 16.00.



#### **Removal of Cast**

Following your fracture, you may be required to have a period of immobilisation in a cast to allow the fracture to heal. When your Consultant thinks you are ready, they will allow this to be removed. It is important that you complete some gentle exercises 3 -4 times a day to prevent the elbow from becoming stiff.

It is common for your elbow to feel uncomfortable when your plaster cast is removed, and your skin may be dry and flaky. You may soak your elbow in warm water to help with this, as well as gently massaging the area with a plain/non-perfumed moisturiser.

In addition to this, warm water can help to reduce your pain and can make movement feel easier. Therefore, doing some of the exercises below in the water or after a bath/shower may be a more comfortable way of doing the exercises.

#### **If you have had an operation for your fracture**

It is important that you ensure your wound has completely healed with no open or wet patches and stitches should be removed before getting the wound wet. This is to minimise your risk of obtaining a post-operative infection.

#### **If you experience any of the following:**

- Severe unrelenting or worsening pain
- Worsening hot/red/swollen wound
- Fever or temperature
- A wound that is oozing or smells

**Contact your GP and ask for an urgent appointment or call 111 as it is important to rule out a wound infection.**

#### **Pain Relief**

Sometimes it is necessary to take pain relief to help you to move your elbow more comfortably. You may have been prescribed some by a doctor or you may wish to discuss your needs with a pharmacist. You may also wish to try heat and ice as described below to help reduce your pain.



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**Application of ice:** Place a wet tea towel directly over your skin, and then place a bag of frozen peas on top of the towel. Keep the peas on for 15 – 20 minutes, checking your skin regularly to avoid an ice burn. Repeat up to 3 times a day.

**Application of heat:** Use a microwavable wheat bag or wrap a hot water bottle in a towel and place over the area. Keep it on for 15 – 20 minutes, checking your skin from time to time. Repeat up to three times a day.

### **Managing Swelling**

It is important that when you are sitting or lying down, you elevate your elbow above the level of your heart using pillows.

This is important, as swelling can reduce the range of movement in your elbow, wrist, and fingers and can make you feel more stiff and sore. Try to move your shoulder and wrist and hand as you normally would to ensure that these joints do not get stiff.



It is advisable that for the first 6 weeks following your fracture, you do not lift anything heavier than a cup of tea. You may notice that your swelling worsens at the end of the day and if you are overusing your arm.

### **Driving**

You may return to driving once when you feel confident that you can safely control your vehicle and perform an emergency stop. It is advisable to inform the DVLA and your insurance company that you are returning to driving.

### **Smoking Cessation**

Evidence has shown that smoking prolongs fracture healing time. It is important that you consider this information with relation to your recent injury. Stopping smoking during the healing phase of your fracture will help ensure optimal recovery from this injury. For advice on smoking cessation and local support available, please refer to the following website: <http://smokefree.nhs.uk> or discuss this with your GP.

### **Exercises**

The exercises overleaf are aimed at helping you to regain range of movement in your elbow and to prevent your elbow from becoming stiff. We would advise that you complete your exercises 3-4 times a day.

It is important that you do not push through pain that you would describe as being more than a 5/10. Any pain or discomfort after you have stopped exercising should settle down within 1 hour of you stopping the exercises. If your pain is still worse as a result of the exercises, you could be overdoing them, try moving your elbow more gently and slowly and consider doing less repetitions.

**For further information please contact:** Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department Telephone: 01603 286990 Monday to Friday between 09.00 - 16.00.

## Stage One Elbow Exercises – from removal of cast

If you have any queries/concerns about your exercises, please call the physiotherapy department on: 01603 286990



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In standing, bend your elbow and then straighten your elbow as much as you comfortably can without pushing through pain.

Repeat 5 - 10 times

Sit or stand. Place your hands on a table.

Slide your hands along the table and straighten your elbows as much as possible. Do not push through pain.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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Stand or sit with your elbow bent and palm turned down. Turn your palm up towards the ceiling and then down towards the floor. Do not push through pain.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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Shrug your shoulders up and down and then forwards and backwards in circular motions.

Repeat 5 - 10 times



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Make a fist and then straighten your fingers. If you cannot make a fist use your other hand to bring your fingers closer to your palm. Repeat 10 times.



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## **Stage Two Elbow Exercises:** **To begin approximately 6-8 weeks post fracture**

If you have any queries/concerns about your exercises, please call the physiotherapy department on: 01603 286990



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You can now use your other hand to help improve your elbow range of movement. Please do not worry if you cannot achieve as much movement as the pictures demonstrate. Go to the point of stretch but do not push through pain that you'd describe as being more than 5/10.

Repeat the exercises 3-4 times a day.

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In standing or sitting. Grasp the wrist of the arm you want to exercise. Bend your elbow as much as you comfortably can using the other hand to bring your hand closer to your shoulder. Go to the point of stretch but do not push through pain.



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Repeat 5 - 10 times.

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In sitting, support your hand on the chair with your fingers pointing backwards. Turn your body towards the hand you are stretching and straighten your elbow.



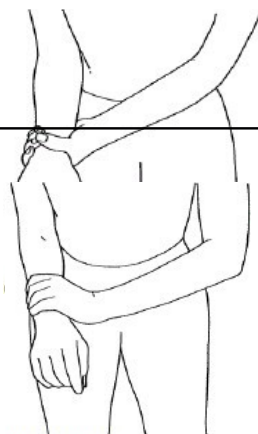
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Do not put your body weight through your elbow. Go to the point of stretch but do not push through pain.

Hold 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

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Sit/stand with your elbow tucked into your side - use your other hand to help turn your palm to the ceiling. Do not push through pain.



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Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

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Sit/stand with your elbow tucked into your side - use your other hand to help turn your palm to the floor. Do not push through pain.

Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

## **Stage Three Elbow Exercises:** **To begin approximately 8-10 weeks post fracture**

If you have any queries/concerns about your exercises, please call the physiotherapy department on: 01603 286990



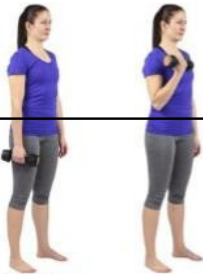
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The following exercises are designed to help you to strengthen your elbow. It is important that you do this gradually: starting with a light weight such as a can of vegetables or a small bottle of water. You may progress to using heavier items as you feel able.

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Stand tall with your arms by your side, hold a weight with one hand.

Keeping your elbow by your side, bend your elbow and bring your palm towards your shoulder. Straighten your arm back to the starting position in a controlled manner.



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Repeat 5 - 10 times.

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Sitting at a table. Place a folded pillow at the edge of the table. Place your upper arm on the pillow with your elbow over the edge of the pillow/table.



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Straighten your elbow using a light weight in your hand to gain more straightening.

Hold 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

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Stand with support from a stable surface. Hold a light weight. Bend forward keeping your back straight.



Start with your elbow bent about halfway and then straighten your elbow as much as you can, bringing your arm back behind you. Do not push through pain.

Repeat 5-10 times

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Stand tall. Hold the weights at shoulder height you're your elbows pointing forward.

Lift weights up by straightening your elbows. Return back to the starting position.

Try not to shrug your shoulders as you do this.

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Repeat 5-10 times.

## **Stage Four Elbow Exercises:** **To begin approximately 10-12 weeks post fracture**

If you have any queries/concerns about your exercises, please call the physiotherapy department on: 01603 286990



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At 10-12 weeks after your injury, you can start taking some body weight through your elbow.

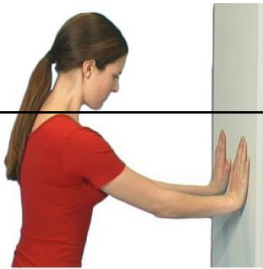
The exercises on this sheet are in order of difficulty. Only progress on to the next exercise if the one before has felt comfortable and easy.

If you are not aiming to get back to doing press ups / return to high level strength, then you may only do choose to do the first 2-3 exercises.

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Lean against a wall with straight arms and fingers pointing upwards. Keeping both hands on the wall shift your weight from your right hand to your left hand.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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Stand with the palms of your hands on a table. Keep your arms straight and fingers pointing forwards. Press down and straighten your fingers against the table. Keeping both hands on the table shift your body weight from one hand to the other.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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On all fours keeping your elbows straight and keeping both hands flat on the floor, shift your body weight gently forwards and backwards over your hands as pain allows.

Then try shifting your body weight gently to the right and to the left. Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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If you are aiming to increase your strength further, a good starting point is trying a wall push up. Stand facing a wall with your arms straight and hands on the wall. Do push-ups against the wall keeping your body in a straight line.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



## **Stage Four Elbow Exercises Part 2:** **To begin approximately 10-12 weeks post fracture**

If you have any queries/concerns about your exercises, please call the physiotherapy department on: 01603 286990



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Sit with your knees bent. Put the palms of your hands on the floor with fingers pointing forwards. Lift your bottom off the floor.

Bend your elbows lowering your bottom in a slow and controlled manner until it touches the floor. Then lift back up.

Repeat 5 – 10 times



If wall push ups feel comfortable, next progress to push ups on your hands and knees.

On your hands and knees, hands slightly wider than shoulders. Buttocks and trunk active, body in a straight line. In a controlled manner lower your chest close to the floor. Push back up.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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If all previous exercises have felt easy and comfortable you may now try a full push up.

Start on your hands and toes, body in a straight line and hands wider than shoulder-width. Press your hands against the floor.



Lower your chest towards the floor while maintaining the straight line of the body. Forearms should stay as upright as possible. Push back to the starting position.



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Repeat 5 - 10 times.