Broken Elbow: Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

A fractured elbow means that a bone has broken in or near the joint. Broken bones (fractures) can range from a small, hairline crack, to a bone or bones broken into two or more pieces. Your treatment depends on how bad the break is.

Your doctor may have put your arm in a cast or splint to allow your elbow to heal or to keep it stable until you see another doctor. You also may wear a sling to help support your arm. It may take weeks or months for your elbow to heal. You can help it heal with some care at home.

You heal best when you take good care of yourself. Eat a variety of healthy foods, and don't smoke.

You may have had a sedative to help you relax. You may be unsteady after having sedation. It can take a few hours for the medicine's effects to wear off. Common side effects of sedation include nausea, vomiting, and feeling sleepy or tired.

The doctor has checked you carefully, but problems can develop later. If you notice any problems or new symptoms, **get medical treatment right away.**

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- If the doctor gave you a sedative:
    - For 24 hours, don't do anything that requires attention to detail, such as going to work, making important decisions, or signing any legal documents. It takes time for the medicine's effects to completely wear off.
    - For your safety, do not drive or operate any machinery that could be dangerous. Wait until the medicine wears off and you can think clearly and react easily.
- Put ice or a cold pack on your arm for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Try to do this every 1 to 2 hours for the next 3 days (when you are awake). Put a thin cloth between the ice and your cast or splint. Keep your cast or splint dry.
- Follow the cast care instructions your doctor gives you. If you have a splint, do not take it off unless your doctor tells you to.
- Be safe with medicines. Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
    - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
    - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- Prop up your arm on pillows when you sit or lie down in the first few days after the injury. Keep your elbow higher than the level of your heart. This will help reduce swelling.
- Follow instructions for exercises to keep your arm strong.
- Wiggle your fingers and wrist often to reduce swelling and stiffness.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You are very sleepy and you have trouble waking up.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new or worse nausea or vomiting.
- You have new or worse pain.
- Your hand or fingers are cool or pale or change color.
- Your cast or splint feels too tight.
- You have tingling, weakness, or numbness in your hand or fingers.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not get better as expected.
- You have problems with your cast or splint.

Where can you learn more?

Go to https://www.healthwise.net/patiented

Enter **W612** in the search box to learn more about **"Broken Elbow: Care Instructions".**

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