

Proximal Humerus Fracture – Rehabilitation Guidelines

Kelowna Bone and Joint Health

Background

- Your surgeon will go over specific guidelines with you. There is a lot of variation depending on fracture patterns and patient considerations.
- Keep your shoulder muscles loose and relaxed. A tense shoulder leads to increased pain and position changes of the fracture.
- Allow the arm to dangle. A broken humerus or shoulder is like a broken stick held together with tape. If you allow it to dangle freely, it lines up nicely. If you push up on the bottom or move the upper part, it goes out of alignment.

0 to 4 Weeks Post-injury

- Keep your shoulder loose and relaxed. Wear the sling or collar-and-cuff when out of the house, and at night. When at home, feel free to loosen or remove the sling completely, but do not actively use your arm.
- Try to maintain reasonably good posture since this tends to reduce pain overall.
- Range of motion for elbow/wrist/hand just to prevent stiffness of these joints. You can exercise your elbow by standing up and gently leaning your upper arm against a wall to support it. Your 'good arm' can hold the hand of the injured arm to move the elbow.
- For washing and changing, lean forward and allow the arm to dangle while keeping the shoulder loose and relaxed.

4 to 6 Weeks Post-injury

- Some stable fractures can start 'pendular' exercises at this time. Do not start early exercises unless specifically instructed by the surgeon.

6 to 9 Weeks Post-injury

- Discontinue the sling and use the arm for all light activities as able, including gradual reaching
- Start stretching frequently in all directions
- Start physiotherapy. Strengthening starts anywhere from 6 to 8 weeks post-injury.
- It's your efforts at stretching and strengthening that make you better, and the physiotherapist guides you along the way

3 months and beyond

- Depending on the 3 month x-ray, most patients can gradually resume activities as able without a formal restriction. Stiffness is very common, and the motion people have at this time is highly variable.
- Pain and stiffness are normal, but it should be slowly and gradually improving on a month-by-month basis
- It takes 1 to 2 years to truly get the most recovery, and the pace of recovery is highly variable. Keep stretching and strengthening for at least a year.

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