

PATIENT EDUCATION RESOURCE

Radial Head Fracture

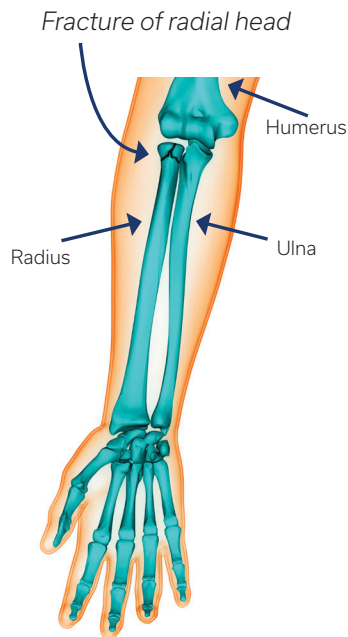


“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

MARYBETH EZAKI, MD, PAST PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR SURGERY OF THE HAND

What is a radial head fracture?

The forearm is made up of two bones, the radius and the ulna, which connect the elbow to the wrist. Working together, these two bones allow for the forearm to turn the palm up and down and bend and straighten the elbow. When the portion of the radius closest to the elbow breaks, it is called a radial head fracture. A radial head fracture is the most common elbow fracture in adults.



What is the treatment for a radial head fracture?

If a doctor suspects that the radial head is fractured, an X-ray of the elbow will be taken. Some fractures may require simple immobilization in a sling, orthosis or cast. Others may require surgery to realign or replace the broken pieces of the bone.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist works directly with a doctor to assist with treating a radial head fracture. A custom orthosis to support and protect the elbow may be made. The therapist will also educate the patient on how to reduce swelling, decrease pain and regain motion and strength of the elbow, wrist and hand.



X-ray of a radial head fracture after surgery

What are the causes of a radial head fracture?

A radial head fracture is usually caused by a fall on to the wrist or through a hit directly on the elbow. High impact sports, falling from a great height and osteoporosis (low bone density) may make it more likely for the radial head to fracture.

What are the symptoms of a radial head fracture?

A fractured radial head may cause a decreased ability to move the forearm and elbow. There may also be swelling, pain and bruising in the elbow or forearm. At times, the elbow may have an abnormal appearance and numbness may be felt in the back of the hand and thumb.



Example of a custom elbow orthosis for a radial head fracture

To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit the American Society of Hand Therapists at www.asht.org or call 856-380-6856.