

Terrible Triad Injury

“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

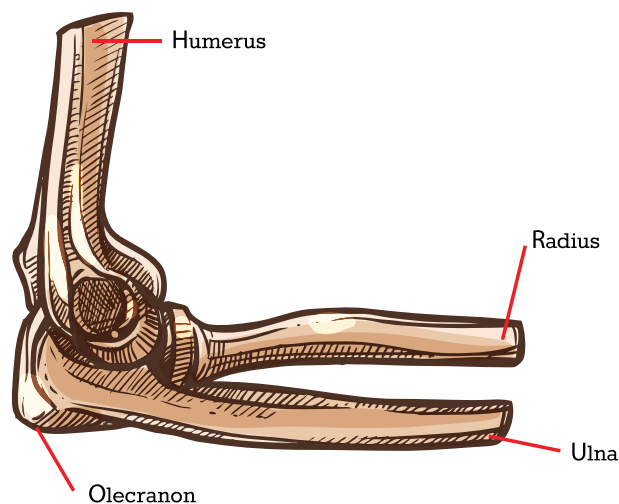
What is a terrible triad injury?

The elbow is made up of three bones – the humerus (upper arm bone), radius (thumb side of forearm) and ulna (small finger side of forearm) – as well as ligaments that support the elbow. A terrible triad injury is an injury of the elbow. A “triad” refers to three different injuries: a dislocated elbow, a break at the end of the radius and break at the end of the ulna. Historically, this injury was called a “terrible triad” when little was known about how to treat the injury.

What causes a terrible triad injury?

A terrible triad injury usually occurs when a person falls on a fully straightened arm.

Bones of the elbow



What are the symptoms of a terrible triad injury?

When the injury happens, there may be pain, swelling, bruising and significant difficulty moving the elbow. A consultation with an orthopedic surgeon is recommended to stabilize the bones and elbow dislocation.

What is the treatment for a terrible triad injury?

A doctor will examine the injured arm, taking X-rays and possibly CT scans, to fully evaluate the bone and ligament injuries of the elbow. Most of these types of injuries are treated with surgery to help stabilize the elbow, but treatment is based on many patient factors and is best discussed with an orthopedic surgeon.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist will work closely with the surgeon to help treat a terrible triad injury. The hand therapist may make an elbow orthosis to support and protect the elbow. The therapist will also educate the patient on how to reduce swelling, decrease pain and safely improve range of motion and strength of the elbow.



X-ray of a dislocated elbow