Looking after the splint/plaster

You will need to be in the sling (and plaster if given one) for 3-7 days. Taking good care of the splint and plaster will prevent skin problems and discomfort.

Do:
• Keep the plaster / sling clean and dry at all times.
• Watch for signs of damage – call the plaster room if you’re worried
• Keep the sling on at all times except for when washing and at night.

Don’t:
• Push anything between the plaster and the skin; it can cause serious injury to the skin.
• Get the plaster wet, it is not waterproof.
• Modify the sling; this may stop it working properly.

After 3-7 days the splint/plaster can be removed. If instructed to by the doctor in clinic you may be able to do this at home without the need for another trip to fracture clinic.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to or after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.
Radial head / neck Fractures
You have been diagnosed with a fracture of a bone in the forearm called the radius. The break is near the elbow, in the part of the bone known as the head or the neck.

This leaflet is designed to tell you what a ‘Radial Head’ or ‘Radial Neck’ Fracture is, how it is treated, and how long it will take to get better. It also tells you what to do if you’re concerned or have any questions.

Which bone is broken?
The radius bone runs between the wrist, closest to the base of the thumb, and the elbow. Towards the elbow, the radius changes shape, these parts are referred to as the ‘radial head’ and the ‘radial neck’. You have broken your radius bone at either the radial head or the radial neck. These fractures are very similar, and the treatment is the same. The x-ray shows that the broken pieces are in a good position and should heal well.

How did I get this fracture?
Fractures of the radial head or the radial neck usually occur during a heavy fall onto an outstretched hand, or by falling directly onto that part of the elbow.

It is usually painful to touch over the fracture site, and you may feel that you do not want to move your elbow. You may also see some swelling or bruising around the elbow.

What treatment will I have?
These fractures are very stable. Usually, a sling is all that is needed to rest the elbow and allow it to heal.

Occasionally, the elbow is placed in a plaster cast to protect it, but this is not necessary and makes no difference to healing. The elbow can get very stiff if not moved early.

Will I be in pain?
It’s normal for you to feel a little sore after this injury. Take pain relief regularly. The pain should settle in a few days.

How long will it take to heal?
Radial Head / Neck fractures usually heal in 6 weeks but the elbow should be gently moved from 3 – 7 days onwards.

Will I need an operation?
No, not usually. Very rarely some fractures may move position or cause stiffness and require an operation. If needed we will talk to you about this in detail.

Will I need physiotherapy?
Yes, the physiotherapist will guide you on the exercises you should do. It is important to exercise regularly to prevent the elbow getting stiff.

What can I expect once the sling / plaster is removed?
It may be stiff at first, this will settle. Once the sling has been removed, you should use the arm as normal, but avoiding contact sports for 4 weeks.

Where to go for more help / information
For questions regarding the splint or plaster:
Please call our nearest Plaster Room to you (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm).

Stoke Mandeville – 01296 315743
Wycombe – 01494 425452

If you are concerned that your fracture isn’t healing properly:
Please call the plaster room and they will take your details and arrange for a further appointment to be sent out to you.

In an emergency attend your nearest A&E Department, but for other concerns contact your GP.