

Humeral Shaft Fracture Fixation — Pre-Operative Patient Guide

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Humeral Shaft Fracture (Broken Upper Arm) — Open Reduction and Internal Fixation (ORIF)

Your Condition & Procedure

The condition

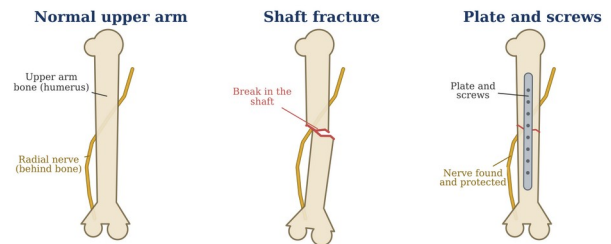
The **humerus** is the upper arm bone. A **humeral shaft fracture** is a break along its long middle part, usually from a fall or direct blow. The **radial nerve**, which lifts the wrist and fingers, wraps closely around this bone and can be stretched by the injury. Surgery is advised when the break is unstable or unlikely to heal well in a brace.

The surgery

Through an incision on the front, side, or back of the arm, the bone is lined up and held with a metal plate and screws. Depending on the incision location, the radial nerve is sometimes found, but always protected during surgery. Some fractures are instead held with a rod (nail) inside the bone. The final plan is determined during surgery.

Risks & benefits

Benefits: A plate gives the arm stable support so you can move the shoulder and elbow early, and most fractures heal reliably. **Risks** are uncommon and include infection, blood clots, radial nerve irritation causing wrist or finger weakness (usually temporary), the bone healing slowly or not at all, hardware irritation that may require removal, injury to nearby structures (such as nerves or blood vessels), stiffness, persistent pain, and the need for further surgery. These will be reviewed with you in detail before surgery.



Humeral shaft fracture and plate fixation (illustration)

Before Surgery

- **Medications:** We will tell you what to stop and when (e.g., blood thinners, anti-inflammatories, some supplements, weight-loss injections).
- **Fasting:** Follow the instructions from your surgery coordinator/facility. In general, you should have nothing to eat or drink starting at midnight the night before surgery.
- **Nicotine:** Stop all nicotine products—they slow healing.
- **Equipment:** A sling is typically provided at or before surgery.
- **Physical therapy:** Schedule your first visit for within about a week after surgery.
- **Home:** Plan for a helper and one-handed tasks at first.
- **Medical history:** Let us know if you or anyone in your family has a history of blood clot disorders or a malignant hyperthermia reaction to anesthesia.
- **Health:** Call us if you develop a fever, illness, or skin problem near the arm.

Day of Surgery

- If instructed, take blood pressure/heart medications with a small sip of water.
- Arrive at the time given by your surgery coordinator.
- Bring your medication list, insurance card, photo ID, and sling if you have them.
- Wear a loose, button-front shirt; leave jewelry and valuables at home.
- A responsible adult must drive you home. You may **not** drive yourself.

Immediately After Surgery

- You will recover in the recovery area; many patients go home the same day, and some stay overnight.
- Your surgeon will discuss the procedure with you and your support person.
- Your care team will review wound care, restrictions, medications, follow-up, and warning signs before discharge.

Milestone	What to Expect After Surgery (General Timeline)
Sling	For comfort only, typically 1–2 weeks. Shoulder, elbow, wrist, and hand motion start right away.
Daily life	Desk work often within 1–2 weeks. Lift only 1–2 lb, with no pushing or pulling, for 6 weeks; leaning on a walker or crutches is usually allowed. No driving while taking narcotic pain medication.
Bone healing	Healing is checked on x-ray around 6 weeks; lifting up to 10 lb and strengthening then begin. Report any new wrist or finger weakness right away.
Activity	Full release typically 3–4 months; throwing and contact sports once healed and strength returns.
► Please note: This is a general guide only. Detailed post-operative instructions will be provided on the day of surgery, and your restrictions and timeline may change based on the findings and procedures performed.	

Learn More

We **strongly recommend** reading these pages from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (OrthoInfo) before your surgery:

- **Related reading: Fractures (Broken Bones)** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/diseases--conditions/fractures-broken-bones/>
 - **Your procedure: Internal Fixation for Fractures** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/treatment/internal-fixation-for-fractures/>
- Video:** You may find a video demonstrating an example (not the exact technique) of your surgery at <https://patient.orthopedia.com/student/catalog>.