

Proximal Humerus Fixation — Pre-Operative Patient Guide

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Proximal Humerus Fracture (Broken Upper Arm Bone at the Shoulder) — Open Reduction and Internal Fixation (ORIF)

Your Condition & Procedure

The condition

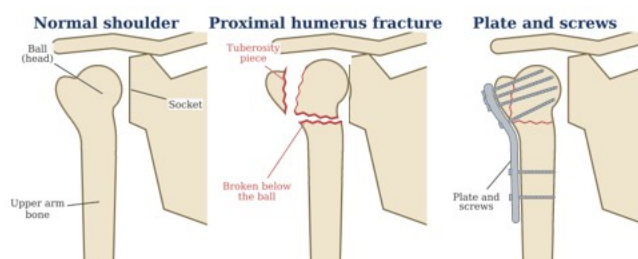
The **proximal humerus** is the top of the upper arm bone—the ball of the shoulder joint and the bony bumps (**tuberosities**) where the rotator cuff tendons attach. It usually breaks in a fall onto the arm or shoulder. When the pieces are badly shifted, the shoulder can heal stiff, weak, or painful.

The surgery

Through an incision at the front of the shoulder, the broken pieces are put back in place and held with a plate and screws, often with strong sutures through the rotator cuff tendons for extra hold. Some fractures are instead held with a rod (nail) inside the bone.

Risks & benefits

Benefits: Restoring the shape of the shoulder gives the best chance of regaining motion, strength, and function. **Risks** are uncommon and include infection, blood clots, shoulder stiffness, the fracture shifting or screws backing into the joint, loss of blood supply to the ball of the shoulder, 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. In some cases, the bone is unable to heal properly due to limited blood supply, and in these cases, the shoulder often does better with a replacement at a later date.



Proximal humerus 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 at first; a recliner can make sleep easier.
- **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 shoulder.

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	Worn for 4 weeks (6 if the bone is fragile), off for therapy, hygiene, and exercises. Your therapist often begins gently moving the shoulder in the first week.
Daily life	Elbow, wrist, and hand motion right away. Desk work often within 1–2 weeks. No lifting, pushing, or leaning on the arm for 6 weeks. No driving while taking narcotic pain medication.
Lifting & overhead	Using the arm on its own begins at 6 weeks, with lifting up to 5 lb. Strengthening and heavier lifting progress once the bone heals (~3 months).
Sports	Light sports ~3–4 months; overhead and heavier sports between 4 and 6 months.
► 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:

- **Your condition: Shoulder Trauma (Fractures and Dislocations)** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/diseases--conditions/shoulder-trauma-fractures-and-dislocations/>
- **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.orthopedica.com/student/activity/2009525-upper-arm-bone-fractures-proximal-humerus-fractures> (or browse <https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/catalog>).