

Radial Head Fracture Surgery — Pre-Operative Patient Guide

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Radial Head Fracture — Fixation (ORIF) or Radial Head Replacement

Your Condition & Procedure

The condition

The **radial head** is the round top of the forearm's radius bone at the outer elbow. It lets you turn your palm up and down and helps keep the elbow stable. It usually breaks in a fall on an outstretched hand, sometimes with torn ligaments or a dislocation. Badly shifted fractures can block motion and leave the elbow unstable.

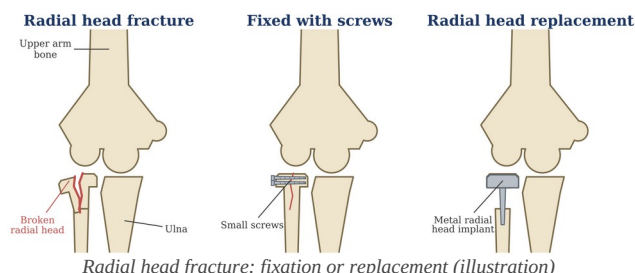
The surgery

This is a typically outpatient surgery through an incision on the outer elbow. Depending on what is found, the broken pieces are put back together with small screws and/or a plate, or, if the radial head is shattered beyond repair, it is replaced with a metal implant. Torn ligaments are repaired at the same time. The final plan is determined during surgery.

Risks & benefits

Benefits: Restoring the radial head and elbow stability gives the best chance of full, pain-free motion.

Risks are uncommon and include infection, blood clots, elbow stiffness (common), the fixation failing or the bone not healing, an implant that loosens or does not fit well, elbow instability, temporary weakness lifting the wrist or fingers from nerve irritation, injury to nearby structures (such as nerves, blood vessels, or cartilage), stiffness, persistent pain, and the need for further surgery. These will be reviewed with you in detail before surgery.



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 splint is placed at surgery; a sling (and a hinged brace if ligaments are repaired) follows.
- **Physical therapy:** Schedule your first visit for within about a week after surgery—early elbow motion is key.
- **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 elbow.

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; most patients go home the same day.
- 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)
Splint & sling	Splint until the first visit (7-10 days), then a sling for comfort. If ligaments were repaired, a hinged elbow brace is worn for 6 weeks.
Motion	Elbow bending, straightening, and forearm rotation start right after the splint comes off. Goal: a functional arc (30° to 130°) by 6 weeks.
Daily life	Desk work often within 1–2 weeks. Lift only 1–2 lb until 6 weeks, then up to 5 lb until 8 weeks. No driving while taking narcotic pain medication.
Activity	Strengthening from 8 weeks; full release typically 3–4 months. Motion keeps improving for up to 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: Radial Head Fractures of the Elbow** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/diseases--conditions/radial-head-fractures-of-the-elbow/>
- **Your procedure: Internal Fixation for Fractures** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/treatment/internal-fixation-for-fractures/>

Questions before surgery? Call our office at (972) 378-1438. For a medical emergency, call 911.