

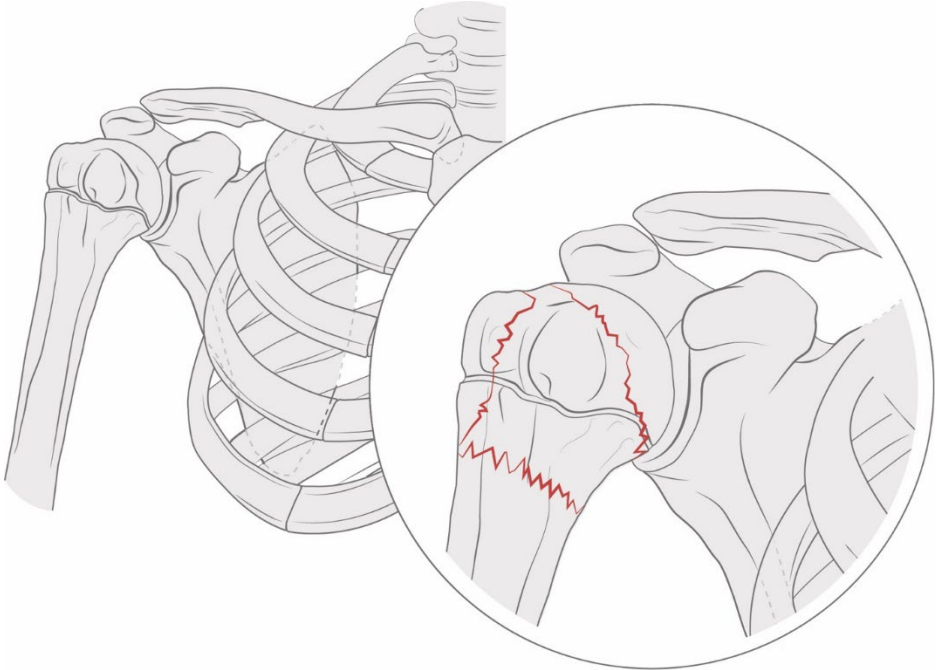
# Information for patients and carers

## Proximal Humerus (Shoulder) Fractures

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of three overlapping, wavy bands of blue. The top band is a light blue, the middle is a medium blue, and the bottom is a dark blue.

## What is my injury?

A proximal humerus fracture is a break at the top of your arm bone, at the level of your shoulder. These injuries are commonly caused by falling onto the arm or shoulder.



## How common are proximal humerus fractures injuries?

Proximal humerus fractures are very common injuries, and the severity of the injury varies from person to person.

## What are the symptoms?

Initially, symptoms commonly include pain, swelling, bruising and difficulty moving the arm. The pain experienced can be severe in some

cases and sometimes can radiate towards the neck or down the arm. It is not uncommon for the whole arm to become swollen and bruised.

## **How should I be looking after my shoulder?**

The treatment in the first few days after a fracture aims to settle down the pain and swelling by applying ice packs, taking regular painkillers and resting the shoulder. Once the initial pain has settled, you can start doing some gentle exercises of your elbow and wrist. Shoulder exercises will be started once your surgeon is happy for you to do so. Sleeping can be troublesome and sleeping propped up with pillows can be helpful. If you smoke, you are advised to stop as smoking can slow down bone healing.

## **What do I do if I have been provided with a “collar and cuff” to wear?**

The collar and cuff sling should be worn for comfort and should be positioned so that it is letting the elbow hang with gravity. This helps keep the bone in a good position for healing. For the first few days you may find it helpful to keep your arm in the collar and cuff and wear loose clothing on top of the collar and cuff, to avoid moving the arm too much. It is important that you take the arm out of the collar and cuff sling at regular intervals to gently move the elbow and wrist so that they do not become stiff, and this will also reduce swelling in the arm.

## **Do I need further X-rays?**

Your x-rays from A&E will be reviewed by an Orthopaedic consultant and depending on the severity of your injury you may be asked to come to a fracture clinic appointment. During this appointment the surgeon will decide whether more x-rays are needed, and what the treatment

should be for your injury. In some cases, the fracture may be in a good position and no follow up or further x-rays are needed.

## **Will I need surgery?**

Most patients do not need surgery, and the treatment for a proximal humerus fracture is a collar and cuff for a short period, followed by gradually increasing the movement in the shoulder. This will often be guided by a physiotherapist, and we will arrange this if we think this will be beneficial for you. Sometimes, in more severe injuries, surgery is required to fix the bone with a plate and screws. If you may need surgery, you will be reviewed in a fracture clinic and the risks and benefits of surgery will be explained in detail.

## **How quickly will things improve?**

Most proximal humerus fractures will heal within 6-8 weeks. The pain can be severe in the first few weeks, but as the fracture starts to heal, the pain should reduce. Occasionally, the bone may take longer to heal than expected, or not heal at all (this is called a non-union). This is more common in people who smoke. These people may have ongoing pain and occasionally will need surgery to address this. If you are having ongoing problems with the shoulder after 6-8 weeks, it is important that you contact us.

## **When can I get back to normal activities?**

In most circumstances, gentle activity can commence after 3 or 4 weeks, however, these injuries can take several months to rehabilitate and shoulder function can continue to improve over 6 months or longer. Return to work should be guided by your symptoms and what your job involves, for example, manual workers may need more time off work

than administration workers due to the nature of their job. In terms of driving, it is your responsibility to ensure you are fit to drive and can fully control your car before you return to driving. The DVLA website has further information regarding this.

Proximal humerus fractures can be a sign that a person has osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is a health condition that weakens bones, making them fragile and more likely to break. It is more common in the elderly, or women who have been through the menopause. We recommend discussing this with your General Practitioner (GP) as you may require further investigations or treatment.

## Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact the Fracture clinic on **01772 522878** 9am-5pm Monday-Friday

## Sources of further information

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[www.patient.info/bones-joints-muscles/broken-upper-arm](http://www.patient.info/bones-joints-muscles/broken-upper-arm)

[www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)

**Follow us on social media @lancshospitals**

**Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.**

All our patient information leaflets are available on our website for patients to access and download:

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets)

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals is a smoke-free site. Smoking is not permitted anywhere on any of our premises, either inside or outside the buildings. Our staff will ask you about your smoking status when you come to hospital and will offer you support and advice about stopping smoking this will include Nicotine Replacement Therapy to help manage your symptoms of withdrawal and the opportunity to speak to a nurse or advisor from the specialist Tobacco and Alcohol Care Team.

If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact Smokefree Lancashire on Freephone **08081962638**

**Please ask a member of staff if you would like help in understanding this information.  
This information can be made available in large print, audio, Braille and in other languages.**

**Department:** Trauma and Orthopaedics

**Division:** Surgery

**Production date:** July 2024

**Review date:** July 2027

**JR 1157 v1**