

Elbow Fractures



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

The elbow is a hinge joint and is made up of three bones. The humerus is the bone from the upper arm, and the radius and ulna are the bones of the lower arm.

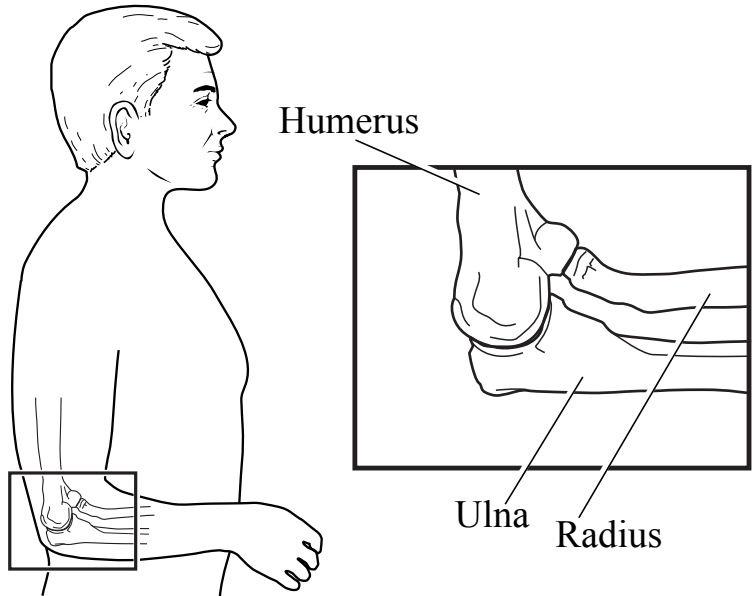
A fracture or broken bone of the elbow often happens from a fall, a hit to the elbow, or twisting of the arm. A pop or snap may be heard and felt.

Signs

- Pain or stiffness at the elbow
- Swelling or bruising

It is common to also have muscle sprains or strains during this injury.

There is also a risk of nerve or blood vessel damage with this injury. If the bone breaks through the skin, there is a high risk for infection.



Treatment

Your doctor will do an exam and order x-rays to see if there is a fracture. Other tests, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or computerized tomography (CT), may be done to check for other damage. Your treatment will be based on the type of fracture you have.

For some fractures, a splint or cast may be used to protect the bone until it heals. Other fractures may require surgery. Pins, screws, or plates may be used to hold bone pieces in place.

- In closed reduction surgery, pins or wires are used to hold the bone pieces together without making an incision.
- Some fractures need open reduction surgery, also called internal fixation, where an incision is made to get to the bone pieces. Bone pieces are set in place and may be held together with pins, plates, or screws.

Your surgeon will talk with you about the best treatment for your injury.

Healing and recovery

- Follow the exercise plan your doctor or occupational therapist gives you to improve your recovery. Exercise will help stiffness in your elbow and arm.
- Avoid tobacco use as it will slow the blood supply to the bone and could slow or prevent bone healing. If you need help quitting, please talk to your doctor.
- Follow your doctor's orders to protect your elbow during healing. You may need to limit your activity before returning to work or school.

As healing occurs, your doctor or therapist may have you start other exercises to help improve motion, strength, and use of your elbow. Follow your exercise program.

Recovery time will depend on the type of fracture and any other injuries. It is not unusual for a bony lump to appear at the fracture site. This is called a fracture callus and is a normal part of healing.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.