

# Simple (undisplaced) supracondylar humerus fractures in children

## Information for children, families and carers

We have given you this factsheet because your child has sustained a simple (undisplaced) supracondylar humerus fracture. It explains what a supracondylar humerus fracture is and how it is treated. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

### What is a supracondylar humerus fracture?

A supracondylar humerus fracture is a break to the lower part of the humerus (the long bone of the upper arm), just above the elbow.

A simple or undisplaced supracondylar humerus fracture means that the bone is broken but still in its normal position.

### What causes this type of injury?

A supracondylar humerus fracture is a common injury in children. It is usually caused by a fall onto an outstretched arm.

### How is this type of injury diagnosed?

An x-ray (a quick and painless procedure commonly used to produce images of the inside of the body) has confirmed your child's injury.

### How is this type of injury treated?

#### Soft plaster cast or back slab plaster cast

We will place your child's arm in either a:

- soft plaster cast (a type of plaster cast that is designed to be flexible but strong enough to protect a broken bone while it heals).
- back slab plaster cast (a type of plaster cast that is made up of plaster and bandage, to allow for some swelling that happens immediately after an injury occurs).

A supracondylar humerus fracture will heal well in both types of cast within three to four weeks.

Once your child's pain eases (usually around three weeks after the injury), the cast can be cut away at home using a pair of ordinary, blunt-ended scissors. We will explain how to safely remove the cast before your child leaves hospital.

## Rest and elevation

Your child may experience some swelling in their fingers for a few days after their injury. To help reduce swelling, your child should rest and elevate (raise above their heart level) their injured arm for the first few days (for example, in a sling or on some pillows).

Your child should try to bend and straighten their fingers regularly while their injury heals.

## Pain relief medication

Your child may experience some pain for the first week after their injury. Taking pain relief medications, such as paracetamol (Calpol®) and ibuprofen, for the first few days after the injury will help to ease their discomfort. Always check the label before giving your child any over-the-counter medications.

## Are there any complications?

It is uncommon for children to experience any complications with a simple supracondylar humerus fracture. However, some children may experience stiffness in their elbow. If this is the case for your child, we may refer them for physiotherapy.

## When can my child resume their normal daily activities?

Your child should try to move their arm as much as they comfortably can for the first few weeks after their cast is removed.

Your child can then gradually resume non-contact activities, such as swimming.

Your child should **not** participate in any contact sports, playground activities or physical education (PE) for six weeks after their plaster cast is removed.

## Will my child need any follow-up care?

Most children will not need physiotherapy after this type of injury and should gradually regain full strength and movement in their arm within a few weeks of the cast being removed.

We may call you six weeks after your child's injury to find out how their injury is healing.

## When should I seek medical help?

Contact us if your child has:

- pain in their arm that is getting worse and does not improve after taking pain relief medication
- a numb sensation in their arm
- difficulty moving their fingers
- swelling around their fingers that is getting worse
- a red coloured or warm arm

These could be signs of a different problem. We may ask you to bring your child to our clinic or take them to your nearest emergency department.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Children's outpatient department

Telephone: **023 8120 4477** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 4.30pm)

Email: [paedorthopaedics@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:paedorthopaedics@uhs.nhs.uk)

## Useful links

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/broken-arm-or-wrist](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/broken-arm-or-wrist)

[www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/x-ray](http://www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/x-ray)

[www.uhs.nhs.uk/for-patients/patient-information-leaflets](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/for-patients/patient-information-leaflets)

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

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