Broken Elbow (Olecranon Fracture)

What is a broken elbow?
A broken elbow, also called an olecranon fracture, is a break in the tip or head of the elbow joint.

How does it occur?
An olecranon fracture usually results from a fall on the elbow.

There are many types of fractures:

- Complete fracture: The broken bone is completely separated at the break.
- Incomplete fracture: The broken bone is not completely separated at the break.
- Comminuted fracture: There are more than two fragments of bone at the fracture.
- Open fracture (compound): The fracture site is open to the air because one end of the bone has broken through the skin.
- Closed fracture: Neither end of the broken bone has broken through the skin.
- Impacted fracture: The broken ends are driven into each other.
- Avulsion fracture: The breaking force has been applied in such a way that the muscle pulls a portion of the bone away from the site where it is normally attached.

What are the symptoms?
Symptoms include:

- pain, especially when you move your elbow
- trouble bending or straightening your elbow
- swelling.

How is it diagnosed?
Your health care provider will examine you and ask about what happened when the injury occurred. You will have an x-ray to find out what kind of injury you have.

How is it treated?
You may need to have surgery. If necessary, your health care provider will use a pin or screw to secure the bone inside.

Your provider will put your arm in a splint or cast so you keep it in one position while it heals. You will probably need to keep your arm in a sling.

How long will the effects last?
Complete healing may take weeks or months, depending on the seriousness of the injury.

How can I take care of myself?
Follow your provider's instructions. In addition:
• When sleeping, elevate your injured arm on pillows.
• Elevate the injured arm to reduce swelling.
• Eat highly nutritious foods to promote healing.

**How can I prevent a broken elbow?**

Many elbow injuries are caused by falls or blows that cannot be prevented. Be careful when walking or exercising.

Adult Health Advisor 2006.4; Copyright © 2006 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All Rights Reserved. Developed by McKesson Provider Technologies. This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.