
Education

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 the 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.

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