Supracondylar humerus fractures with displacement

Your child has broken their arm just above the elbow. Your child will need to be taken to the operating room to realign the bone and have temporary pins placed into the bone to hold it in place while the break heals. After surgery, a backslab (half cast) and sling are required to allow the bones to heal properly.

The first 24-48 hours after surgery

Your child’s arm, hand and fingers may swell in the first 24-48 hours after surgery. To decrease this swelling, your child should rest their arm up onto a pillow when sitting or lying down.

You should encourage your child to bend and straighten their fingers every hour while they are awake. You should check the temperature, colour and movement of their fingers about every 4 hours while they are awake.

You child will have pain in their elbow initially. The medication provided by your child’s surgeon will help decrease their pain. Other medication such as ibuprofen (e.g. Advil™) or acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol™) as needed following the directions on the bottle will also help decrease their pain.

Signs of a problem

- Severe pain when moving their fingers
- Fingers that are blue or white
- Fingers that are cold (you can compare them to the fingers on their other hand)
- Fingers that cannot curl up or straighten out
- Numbness or pins and needles in their fingers
If you child has any of these signs, rest your child's arm on a pillow while lying down for 30 minutes.

If the problem does not get better, call your surgeon, or go to the hospital.

**Follow-up appointments**

Your child will have a review by the surgeon in the fracture clinic or outpatient clinic about 3 weeks after the surgery. At this appointment, the backslab will be taken off, the pins will be removed, and x-rays of the elbow will be taken. Another appointment will be arranged for 3 months following the date of injury to check the movement of the elbow. Most children will be discharged from the clinic at this stage.

After removing the backslab, your child's arm may be dry and itchy and look dirty. Use warm water and soap to gently wash the arm and cream to moisturize the skin.

When the backslab is off, your child can begin moving the elbow. At first, the elbow and wrist may be stiff. The movement will get better with time but this may take up to one year. Physiotherapy is not recommended.

To decrease the risk of rebreaking their arm, your child should not participate in high-risk activities such as playing on monkey-bars, ice-skating, skateboarding and sports for 12 weeks after their injury.

**Key Points**

- Your child needs surgery to realign the broken arm and temporary pins and a backslab (half cast) to hold the broken bone in place while it heals.
- The backslab and pins will be removed in the clinic about 3 weeks after surgery.
- Your child will need to avoid high-risk activities for a total of 12 weeks after their injury.
- Your child's elbow may need a year to fully recover strength and movement.