Proximal humerus fracture: Non-operative management

Your child has broken (fractured) their arm (humerus) just below the shoulder. This fracture usually heals well in a simple sling. The sling will help keep your child comfortable while the bone heals.

It is often easiest to place the backslab and sling under loose clothing instead of through a shirt sleeve.

The first 24-48 hours after injury

Your child will have pain in their shoulder initially. Medication such as ibuprofen (e.g. Advil™) as needed following the directions on the bottle will help decrease their pain.

Although nerve and artery injuries are very rare with this injury, you should return to the emergency department if your child develops numbness or tingling in the hand.

Follow-up appointment

Your child will have a review by the doctor in the fracture clinic about 7-10 days after injury. The doctor may order new x-rays at your follow-up appointment. The doctor will ask you to take off the sling 4 weeks after the injury and allow your child to begin moving their shoulder. No further follow-up is usually required.
After 4 weeks

Remove the sling 4 weeks after your child broke their arm. With the sling off, your child can begin moving the shoulder. At first, shoulder may be stiff. The movement will get better with time but this may take up to one year. Physiotherapy is not usually necessary.

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. However, your child can return to low risk sports such as swimming as soon as their shoulder is comfortable.

Contact your doctor if your child continues to have pain in the shoulder 6 weeks after the injury.

Contact your doctor if your child has not regained normal shoulder movement 6 months after injury.

Key Points

- Your child needs a sling to help heal their broken arm.
- You will take off the sling at home after 4 weeks.
- Your child will need to avoid high-risk activities for a total of 12 weeks after their injury.
- Your child's shoulder may need a year to fully recover strength and movement.

Content developed by Dr. Arahon Gladstein and approved by the SKPOP Committee on December 1st 2015.