

Radial Head Replacement

What is the radial head?

The radial head is a bone in the elbow that connects with the distal humerus. It is the top of the radius bone which extends from the elbow to the wrist. The radial head is important for elbow stability and rotation of the palm to face up and down.

Why does the radial head need to be replaced?

When the radial head is fractured in more than 2 pieces or in the setting of an elbow dislocation the patient will typically have better results if the radial head is replaced. In instances where the radial head is in 2 pieces and can be fixed Dr. Acevedo will perform an open reduction internal fixation of the radial head and fix it with screws. However most of the time when the radial head is fractured, a radial head replacement will be the treatment of choice.

How do you replace the radial head?

The radial head replacement will be performed through a small incision on the outside part of the elbow about 5 cm in length. At the end of the procedure will be closed with a nonabsorbable suture and will not be very noticeable

Length of Stay

This is an outpatient procedure, which means you will go home on the same day after surgery.

Anesthesia

Patients usually have general anesthesia, which means you are asleep.

Incision

You will have an incision in the bend of your elbow, once it heals it will be not very noticeable.

Pain

You will have pain medication prescribed for you prior to discharge. Most of the pain is related to your very swollen shoulder. That swelling will resolve in 24-48 hours. It is important to stay on top of the pain medication. Most patients receive Toradol, which is a strong anti-inflammatory. Begin taking this medication when you get home. The Narcotic you are prescribed should be used as a rescue medication as needed. For the first 2 days it is advised that you take 1 of these "narcotic" pills around the clock to stay on top of the pain. If it is too strong, you can take Extra strength Tylenol in its place.

Splint

Your arm will be placed in a splint prior to leaving the operating room. You are to remain in your splint 24 hours a day. This includes sleeping in your splint. At the post op visit, the splint will be removed.

Dressings

You will go home with gauze dressings covered with the splint and wrap. You are to leave those in place until your first post operative visit (10-14 days after the day of surgery). You may cover the splint and dressings with a plastic trash bag to keep them dry while showering.

Physical Therapy

You can go to formal physical therapy after 2 weeks. If you prefer home therapy, Dr Acevedo can prescribe you a program with the MyHealthTrack app. While you are at home and is encouraged to perform range of motion exercises with your hand and practice opening and closing your fist. This will help prevent hand stiffness as well as mitigate swelling.

Restrictions

Recovery from a radial head replacement is three months. During that time, you will have restrictions on the use of your operative arm.

Day of surgery to 6 weeks: remain in brace, no use of arm for any work, no driving. OK to type and write.

Months 1.5-3: no lifting and carrying anything greater than 5 lbs.

Follow Up Appt

You should have had your follow up appointment made at the time of your preoperative appointment. You should be seen at around 10-14 days.

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