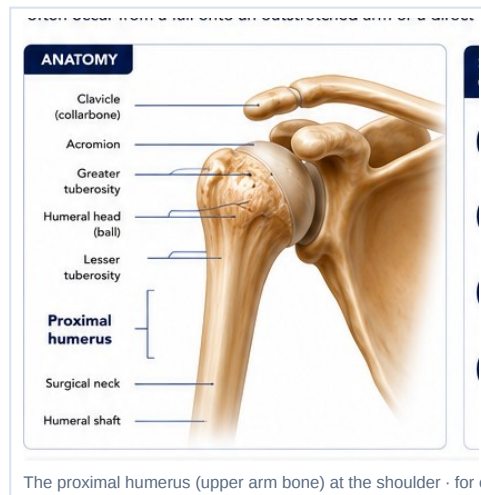


SHOULDER CONDITION

Proximal Humerus Fracture

Upper Arm / Shoulder Fracture — Patient Condition Guide



OVERVIEW

A proximal humerus fracture is a break of the upper end of the arm bone at the shoulder. It is one of the most common fractures — especially after falls in patients over 60 — but also occurs in athletes and after high-energy injuries. Treatment depends on how many pieces the bone has broken into and how far they have shifted.

SYMPTOMS

- Immediate shoulder pain and inability to raise the arm after a fall or impact
- Swelling and extensive bruising that may track down the arm and chest
- Grinding with attempted motion

DIAGNOSIS

X-rays define the fracture pattern; CT scans are used for complex, multi-part fractures to plan treatment. Dr. Pettit also assesses the nerves and circulation of the arm.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Most proximal humerus fractures are minimally displaced and heal well without surgery, using a sling followed by progressive, protocol-guided motion. Displaced or unstable patterns may benefit from surgical fixation with a plate and screws (ORIF). In older patients with severe fracture patterns, reverse total shoulder replacement often provides the most reliable return of function.

RECOVERY OUTLOOK

Early motion is the key to a good result and is started as soon as the fracture pattern allows. Most patients regain functional, comfortable shoulders over 3–6 months, with strength continuing to improve up to a year.



SCAN FOR THE LATEST VERSION ONLINE

robertpettitmd.com/handouts/proximal-humerus-fracture.pdf

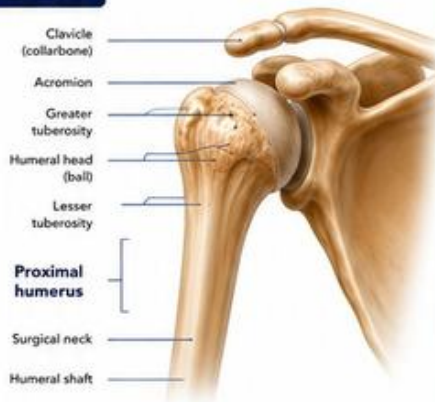
This handout is for general patient education and does not replace personalized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given by Dr. Pettit and your care team.

© 2026 ROBERT PETTIT, MD · BEACON ORTHOPAEDICS & SPORTS MEDICINE · SHOULDER CONDITION

PROXIMAL HUMERUS FRACTURE

A proximal humerus fracture is a break in the upper part of the arm bone (humerus) near the shoulder joint. These fractures are common, especially in older adults, and often occur from a fall onto an outstretched arm or a direct blow to the shoulder.

ANATOMY



SURGICAL BENEFITS (WHEN SURGERY IS NEEDED)

- Relieves pain
- Improves strength and stability
- Improves ability to perform daily activities
- Improves sleep quality

REVERSE SHOULDER REPLACEMENT AN OPTION FOR COMPLEX FRACTURES

For fractures that cannot be fixed reliably, a reverse shoulder replacement may be the best option.



The ball (glenosphere) is attached to the shoulder blade. The socket is placed on the upper arm bone (humerus).

TYPES OF PROXIMAL HUMERUS FRACTURES



COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Pain in the shoulder
- Swelling and bruising
- Difficulty moving the shoulder
- Deformity or visible bump
- Weakness
- Pain that may radiate down the arm

COMMON CAUSES

- Fall on an outstretched arm
- Direct blow to the shoulder
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Sports injuries
- Osteoporosis (weakened bone) increases risk in older adults

TREATMENT OPTIONS



NON-SURGICAL TREATMENT

- For nondisplaced or minimally displaced fractures
- Sling for comfort (typically 1–3 weeks)
- Ice and pain medication
- Physical therapy to restore motion and strength
- Healing typically takes 6–12 weeks



SURGICAL TREATMENT

- For displaced, unstable, or complex fractures
- Options include plate and screws, intramedullary nail, or reverse shoulder replacement
- Surgery helps restore alignment, stability, and function
- For the best outcome

SURGICAL OPTIONS (FOR DISPLACED OR COMPLEX FRACTURES)

LOCKING PLATE AND SCREW FIXATION (ARTHREX PROXIMAL HUMERUS PLATE)



- Contoured plate placed on the outside of the humerus and secured with multiple locking screws
- Provides stable fixation of the fracture fragments and allows early movement

Arthrex



INTRAMEDULLARY NAILING (ARTHREX PROXIMAL HUMERUS NAIL)



- Metal rod is inserted into the center of the humerus and locked in place with screws
- Minimally invasive approach with smaller incisions

Arthrex



REVERSE SHOULDER REPLACEMENT (ARTHREX REVERSE SYSTEM)



- Used for complex fractures, poor bone quality, or in older adults
- Replaces the damaged joint surfaces to restore stability and function

Arthrex



RECOVERY AND RETURN TO ACTIVITY (GENERAL TIMELINE)



Every fracture is unique. Your treatment plan will be tailored to your specific injury, goals, and activity level. Follow your surgeon's instructions for the best outcome.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND COMPLICATIONS

- Infection
- Dislocation
- Nerve or blood vessel injury
- Fracture
- Loosening or failure of components
- Stiffness
- Scapular notching (with reverse replacement)
- Continued pain or weakness
- Need for revision surgery

