



Using a sling

You have been given a sling to support your arm after an injury or procedure. It rests the arm, eases pain and reduces swelling while you heal. This sheet explains how to wear it safely and look after your arm.

What is it?

A sling holds your forearm across your body, with your hand slightly higher than your elbow. It takes the weight off your shoulder, elbow or wrist. How long you need it depends on your injury: sometimes only a few days, sometimes several weeks. Keeping the arm completely still for too long can make joints stiff, so follow the advice you were given about moving.

Looking after yourself at home

- Wear the sling so your hand sits a little higher than your elbow, with the strap padded at your neck.
- Take it off only as advised, such as for washing or gentle exercises, and support the arm when you do.
- Move your fingers, and your wrist and elbow if allowed, several times a day to prevent stiffness.
- Check the skin at your neck and under your arm each day, and keep it clean and dry.
- Remove rings and watches from the injured arm in case it swells.
- Sleep propped up on pillows if lying flat is painful. Do not drive while wearing a sling.

Medicines

- Paracetamol can help the pain, unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- Ibuprofen may also help, unless your doctor told you not to. Avoid it with a stomach ulcer, kidney disease, some asthma, or pregnancy.

Follow-up

- Go to any fracture clinic or follow-up appointment you were given.
- See your family doctor or health centre if pain or stiffness is not improving after 1 to 2 weeks.
- Ask when you can stop the sling and return to work, sport or driving.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- Fingers become numb, cold, pale or blue
- Severe pain or swelling that keeps getting worse, even with the arm raised and painkillers
- You cannot move your fingers
- The skin under the strap becomes very sore, broken, or blistered
- Pain, swelling and redness in the arm with fever



Scan to read this sheet on your phone

This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

EM Orbit · Emergency medicine, in one orbit · sling-en