

Sling Advice

Information for patients

If you have suffered an injury to your shoulder, elbow, or upper arm, you may be required to wear a sling on your arm to help protect it while things are healing. Wearing a sling keeps your arm against your body and prevents you from moving your arm too much as you heal after injury. Wearing your sling incorrectly may delay your healing or injure your arm further.

Your sling should fit comfortably and not feel binding or tight. It should maintain your shoulder, elbow, and wrist in a relaxed position so you can go about your day-to-day activities.

If you are caring for an elderly patient with a sling, encourage the patient to wiggle their fingers to help move blood and fluids to the injured arm. The patient may need assistance with toileting and dressing.

If you are looking after someone who wearing a sling observe for worsening swelling, new pain or no improvement. Also check the arm to make sure there are no new breaks to the skin, this could be a sore from pressure. If you have any concerns please seek further guidance.

For some injuries your sling should be kept on while you are in bed at night, the nurses will advise you of this. You may find it more comfortable to sleep on your back initially with a pillow under your injured arm for support. You may also find it more comfortable to sleep in a semi-sitting position.

Do

- Wear any slings or support given, as advised
- stay active and gently move your shoulder/elbow
- rest your arm on a cushion in your lap
- use pain relief so you can keep moving – try painkillers like paracetamol and ibuprofen, and heat or cold packs

Don't

- do not completely stop using your shoulder/elbow – this can stop it getting better
- do not do things that seem to make it worse
- do not make up your own strenuous exercises or use heavy gym equipment
- Avoid heavy lifting initially after injury

See a GP if:

- the pain does not improve after 2 weeks
- it's very difficult to move your arm or shoulder

Seek urgent advice if:

- you cannot move your arm
- your arm or shoulder has changed shape or is badly swollen
- you have pins and needles that do not go away
- there's no feeling in your arm or shoulder
- your arm or shoulder is hot or cold to touch