

PHYSICAL THERAPY PROTOCOL

Both-Bone Forearm Fracture — Open Reduction & Internal Fixation

Plate fixation of the radius and ulna

Both forearm bones have been stabilized with plates. Early motion of the digits, elbow, and shoulder prevents stiffness, and gentle wrist/forearm motion begins per fixation stability. Forearm fractures can be slow to unite, so strengthening and loading are delayed until radiographic healing is confirmed.

General Precautions

- Splint initially; keep incisions clean and dry.
- No lifting or weight bearing through the arm until union is confirmed (often ~10-12+ weeks).
- Maintain full digit motion at all times.
- No resisted forearm rotation early.

Phase I — Early Motion Weeks 0-2

Goals

- Control swelling
- Full digit motion
- Begin gentle wrist/forearm/elbow motion

Precautions / Restrictions

- No gripping loads or weight bearing
- Splint between exercises

Exercises & Interventions

- Full active finger, thumb, elbow, and shoulder motion
- Tendon gliding
- Gentle active wrist and forearm (pronation/supination) motion as directed
- Edema control / elevation

Criteria to Advance

- Full digit motion
- Swelling controlled

Phase II — Motion Weeks 2-6

Goals

- Restore full wrist, forearm, and elbow motion
- Scar management

Precautions / Restrictions

- No resisted strengthening / lifting

Exercises & Interventions

- Progress active wrist/forearm/elbow motion to full
- Gentle stretching toward full rotation

- Scar mobilization

Criteria to Advance

- Improving motion
- Radiographs showing progressing healing

Phase III — Strengthening Weeks 6-12

Goals

- Restore strength once healed

Precautions / Restrictions

- Strengthening begins after surgeon confirms adequate healing

Exercises & Interventions

- Progressive grip, wrist, and forearm-rotation strengthening
- Elbow strengthening
- Work-conditioning as needed

Criteria to Advance

- Radiographic union
- Grip/rotation strength improving

Phase IV — Return to Activity Months 3-6

Goals

- Return to full function

Precautions / Restrictions

- Avoid heavy loading and contact until union is confirmed (may take 3-4 months)

Exercises & Interventions

- Progressive strengthening
- Sport-/job-specific loading

Criteria to Advance

- Functional strength
- Surgeon clearance for full loading/contact

This protocol is a general guideline. Progression is criteria-based and may be advanced or slowed by Dr. O'Donnell based on intraoperative findings, tissue quality, fixation, and individual healing. Time frames are approximate. Direct questions to the office at (305) 393-8810.