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Rehabilitation Protocol for Distal Humerus Fracture Open Reduction Internal Fixation

Phase I: Early ROM & Protect Fixation (0-4 weeks)

- Splint and postop dressing remains in place for first 2 weeks
- Hinged elbow brace worn at all times (after the initial dressing is removed)
- Initiate elbow exercise program 5 times/day
 - Passive extension to 0 degrees as tolerated
 - Active flexion to 90 as tolerated
 - Progress to full supination/pronation
- Shoulder/wrist/hand exercises encouraged
- Edema control
- Avoid active elbow extension x 6 weeks postop
- Grip and wrist/hand AROM immediately
- Perform supination ROM only with the elbow flexed to 90 degrees

Phase II: Advance ROM and function (4-6 weeks)

- Passive extension to 0 degrees as tolerated
- Active/passive flexion may increase by 10 degrees per week as tolerated
- Progress to full supination/pronation
- Progress to active/ active assist ROM
- Begin wrist, forearm, and hand/finger strengthening exercises

Phase III: Full ROM and function (6-10 weeks)

- Wean from brace once fracture healing on X-ray (typically 6-8 weeks)
- May begin static progressive splinting if failure to achieve > 100 degree arc ROM by 8 weeks
- Begin active elbow extension
- Progress with strengthening slowly
 - 5 lb lifting restriction at 6 weeks
 - 15 lb lifting restriction at 8 weeks
- Transition to home exercise program (HEP) by 8-10 weeks

Phase IV: Full ROM and function (10-12 weeks+)

- Gradually return to light activity and exercise
- No further activity restrictions after 12 weeks if cleared by Dr. Bodendorfer