

Pediatric Supracondylar Humerus Fractures

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OBJECTIVES

By the end of this presentation, learners will be better able to:

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of more severe pediatric supracondylar humerus fractures (SCHF)
- Assess the degree of displacement of pediatric SCHF on radiographs
- Determine the type of fracture according to the modified Gartland classification
- Prescribe appropriate treatment for SCHF based on fracture characteristics
- Describe the technique of closed reduction and percutaneous pinning of pediatric SCHF
- Recognize SCHF that may require more complex care and manage them appropriately

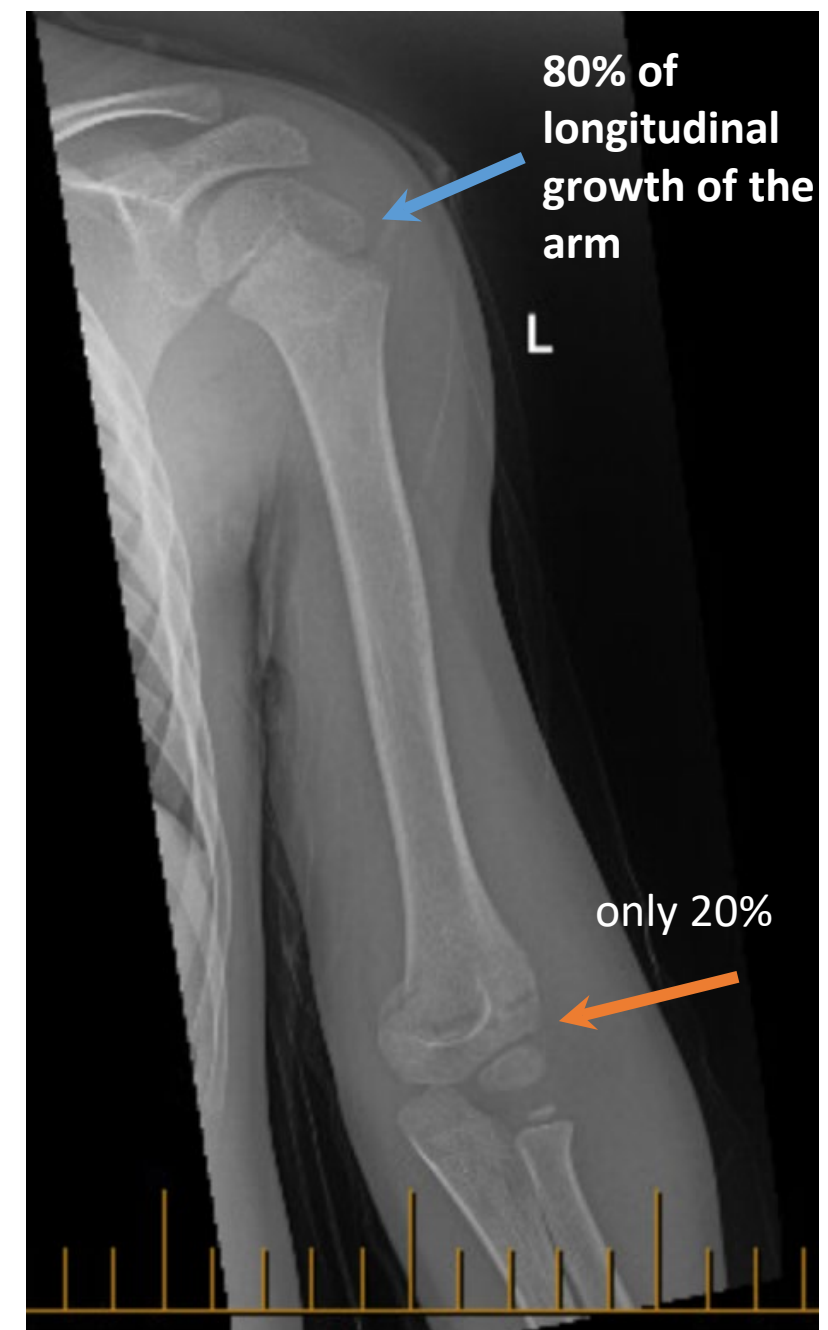
PEDIATRIC SUPRACONDYLAR HUMERUS FRACTURES (SCHF)

- Most common elbow fracture in children
- Most commonly occurs in 5-7yo children
- Most common mechanism of injury is from a low energy fall
 - FOOSH for extension types (common)
 - Monkeybars, trampolines, cartwheels, etc
 - Fall on flexed elbow for flexion types (uncommon)



PEDIATRIC SCHF

- Most common surgical pediatric fracture
 - Frequently require surgical treatment to avoid complications due to:
 - Limited contribution of growth of distal humerus = limited remodeling potential
- Displaced SCHF are unstable and require reduction and stabilization to heal in appropriate alignment



PHYSICAL EXAM

- Pain
- Refusal/inability to move the elbow
- Deformity proportional to displacement
- Swelling & bruising
- Skin integrity
 - Tenting/compromise
 - Open fractures



PHYSICAL EXAM

- Brachialis sign:
 - Antecubital ecchymosis
 - Skin puckering
 - Subcutaneous bone fragment (soft-tissue interposition)
 - Indicator of:
 - Significant injury and swelling
 - Potential failure of closed reduction
- *Will require milking maneuver (discussed later)



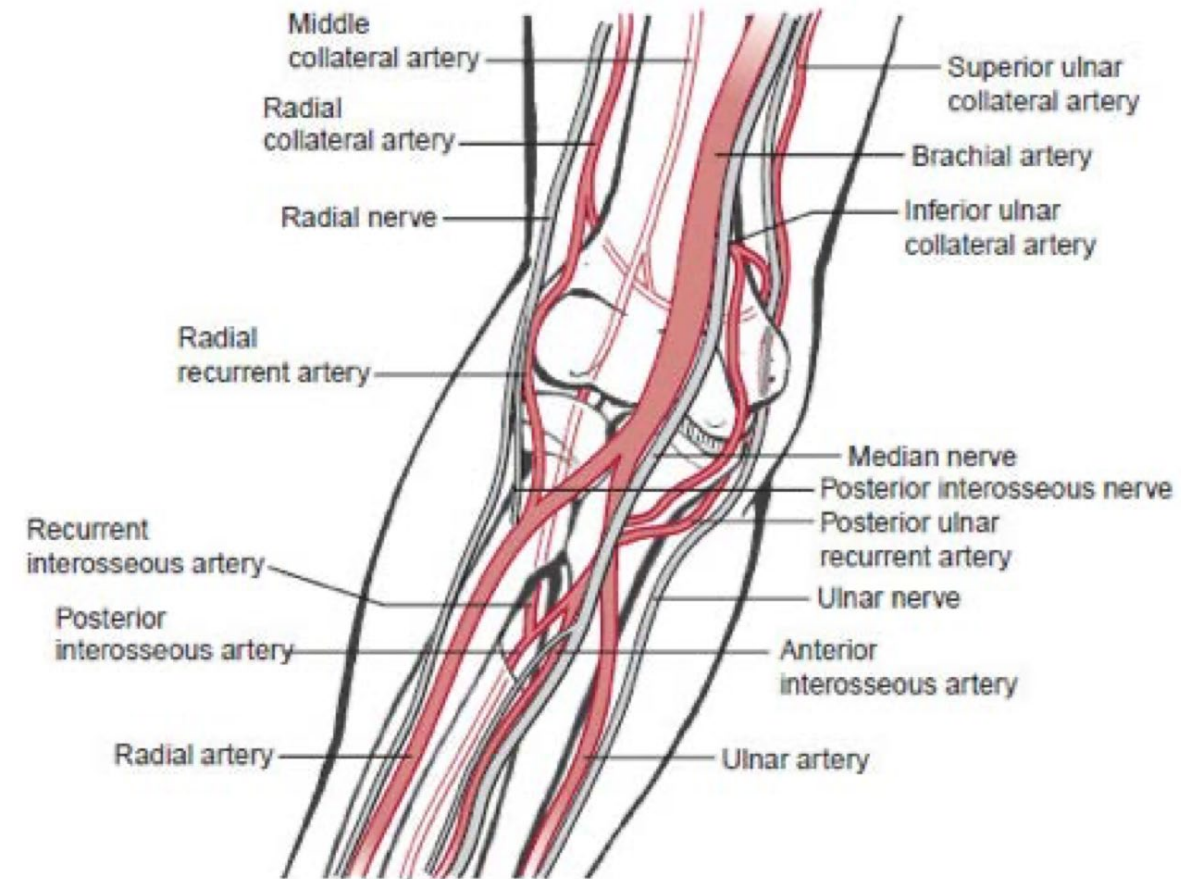
Courtesy of Mark Sinclair, MD

Core Curriculum V5

NEUROVASCULAR EXAM

- Relatively high rate of neurovascular injuries due to intimate relationship of nerves and artery to displaced fracture fragments
- Neurologic exam can be challenging in injured child but important to document pre-manipulation exam
- Pulseless hand may still be perfused because of excellent collateral circulation in pediatric elbow

Neurovascular structures around the elbow



Rockwood and Green, Fig 33-7

Core Curriculum V5

VASCULAR INJURY

- Occurs in 0.5-5%
- Vascular status
 - Assess pulse (palpation or doppler)
 - Assess perfusion
 - Capillary refill (<2s)
 - Warmth of fingers
 - Color of skin



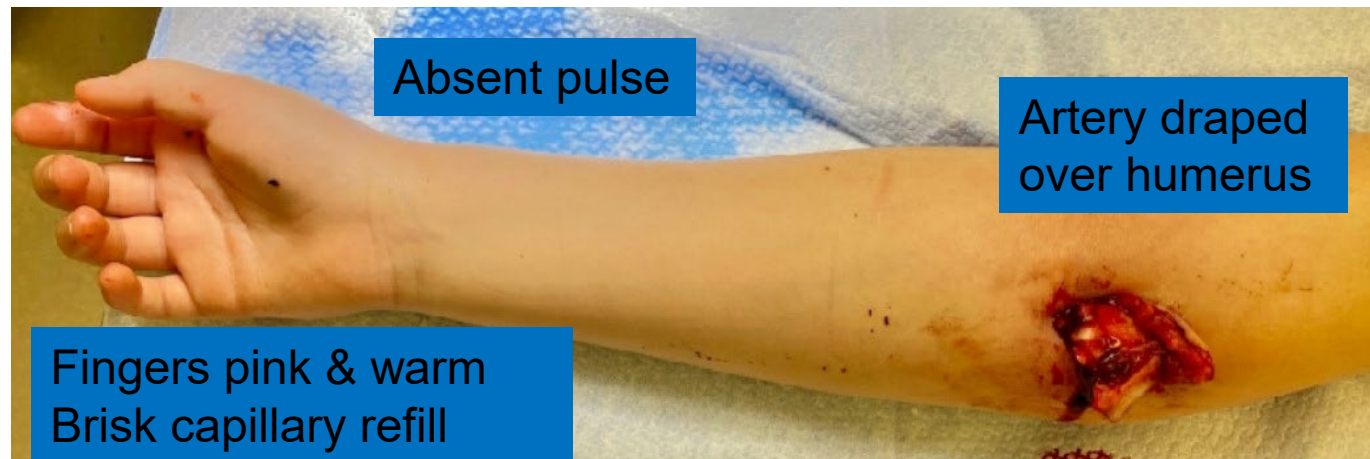
VASCULAR STATUS

- **3 categories:**

Pulse present, perfused hand

Pulse absent, perfused hand

Pulse absent, nonperfused hand



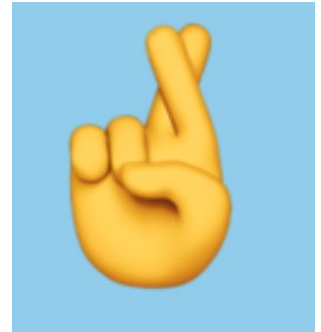
Courtesy of Micah Sinclair, MD

NEUROLOGIC EXAM

- What to assess:
 - Median nerve: sensation pulp of index finger
 - Anterior interosseus nerve: flexion IP thumb and DIP index
 - Radial nerve: sensation dorsum of thumb
 - Posterior interosseus nerve: extension IP thumb
 - Don't be fooled by intrinsic (extension finger IPs)
 - Ulnar nerves: finger abduction/adduction

BEDSIDE TEST (many options):

Thumbs up (PIN) - Cross Fingers (Ulnar N) - AOK (AIN)



NEUROLOGIC INJURY

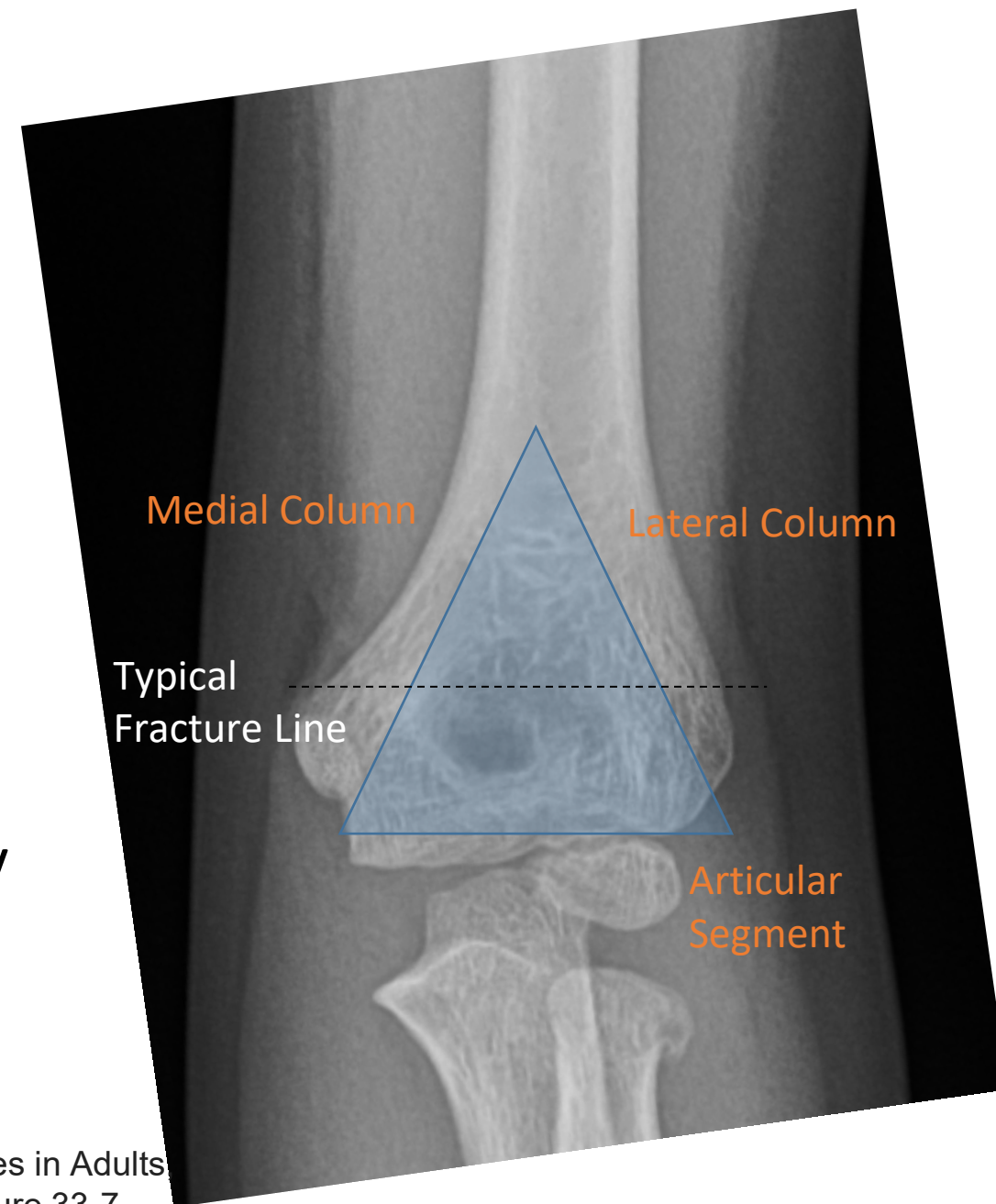
- Occurs almost exclusively in Type 3 or Flexion Types

Nerve Injuries		
	EXTENSION TYPE	FLEXION TYPE
Total Percentage	12.7%	16.6%
Median N	3.3% (21.3%)	5.1% (8.7%)
AIN	5.3% (34.1%)	0%
Radial N	4.5% (26.6%)	0%
PIN	1.1% (2.0%)	0%
Ulnar N	2.3% (15.8%)	16.6% (91.3%)

- **RISK FACTOR:**
 - Median N/AIN: posterolateral displacement
 - Radial N: posteromedial displacement
 - Ulnar N: flexion types

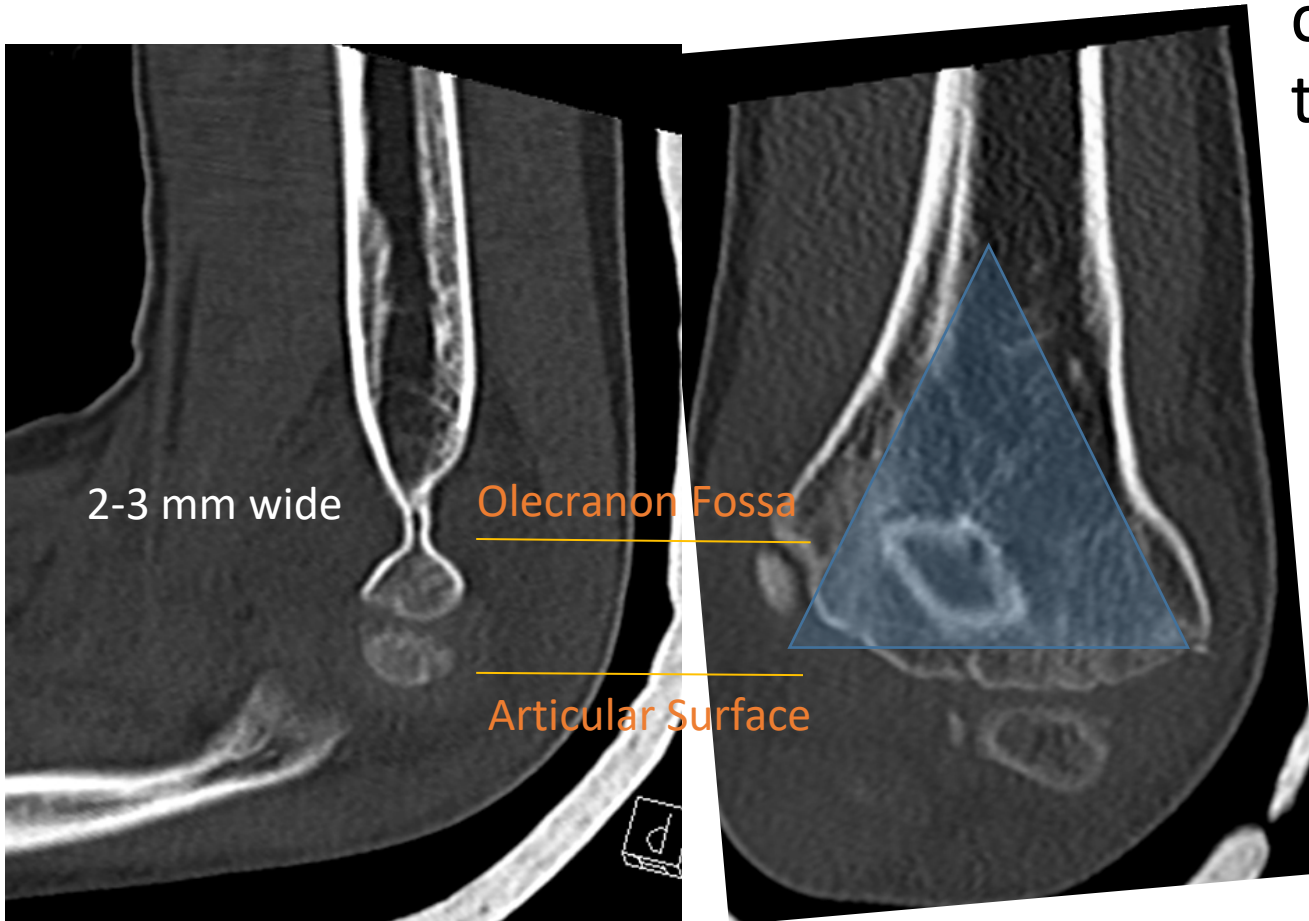
OSTEOLOGY

- Distal humerus composed of medial and lateral columns connected by the articular segment
- Displaced fractures inherently unstable
 - Medial/lateral columns displace easily



Tornetta P, Ricci WM, eds. Rockwood and Green's Fractures in Adults 9e. Philadelphia, PA. Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc; 2019. Figure 33-7

OSTEOLOGY



- Medial and lateral columns connected by a thin wafer of bone through olecranon fossa
 - Point of weakness, prone to fracture
 - Muscles lose mechanical advantage when elbow extended past neutral (hyperextension common in children)
 - Olecranon acts as a fulcrum
 - Capsule transmits an extension force to distal humerus just proximal to the physis

IMAGING

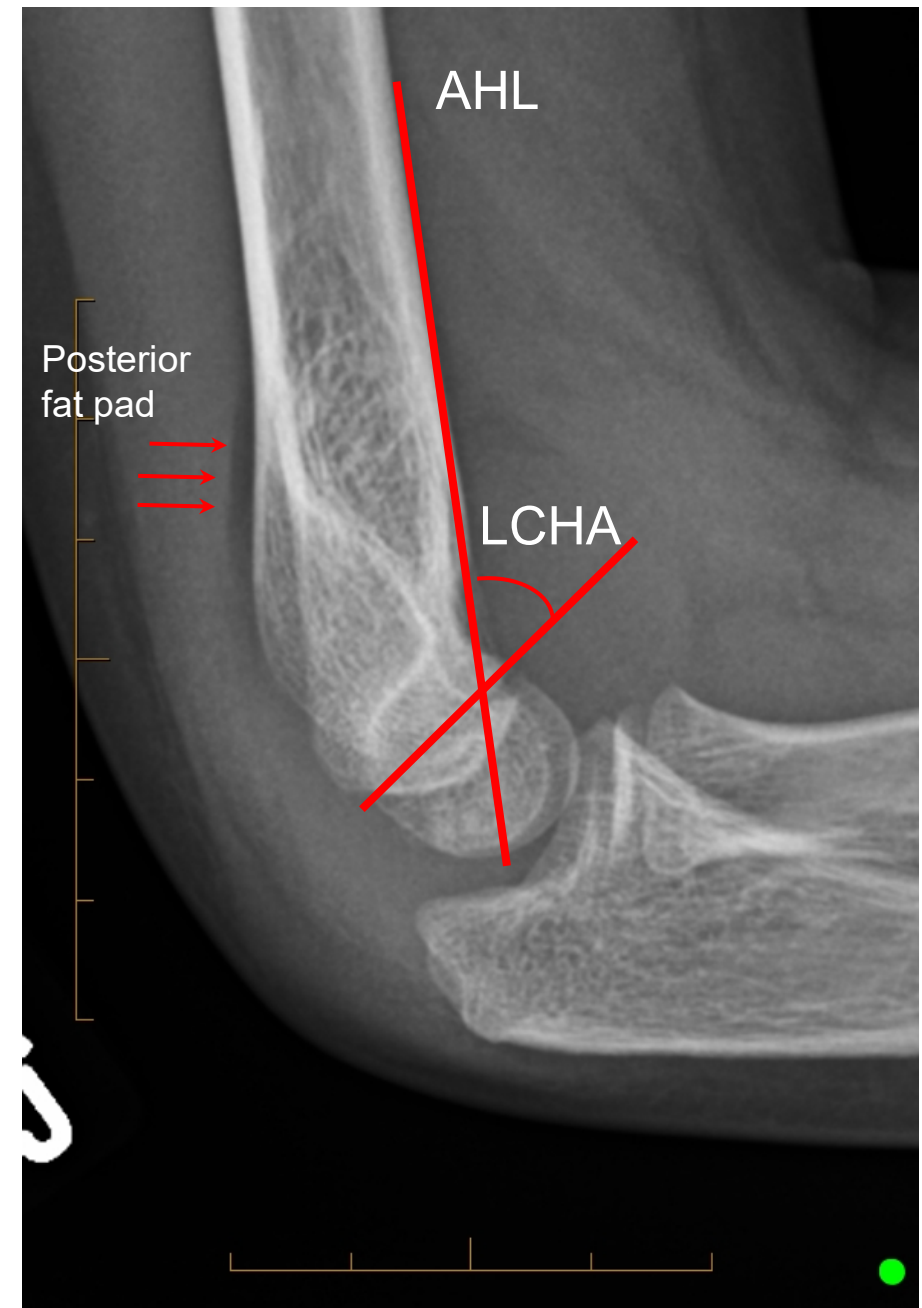
- XR usually sufficient
 - AP + LAT of elbow
 - Ipsilateral forearm/wrist
- Look for posterior fat pad sign in non displaced fractures (arrow)
- Advanced imaging rarely indicated (intra-articular variant)



IMAGING

Distal humerus alignment (true lateral):

- Anterior humeral line (AHL): should intersect capitellar ossific nucleus
- Anterior tilt of capitellum (30-40°)
 - Lateral capitellohumeral angle (LCHA) $\rightarrow < 69^\circ$
- Posterior fat pad sign (highly suggestive of fracture whereas anterior fat pad sign can occur without fracture)



IMAGING



Distal humerus alignment (AP):

- Baumann's Angle: formed by a line perpendicular to the axis of the humerus, and a line that goes through the physis of the capitellum
 - Wide range of normal for this value (9-26 deg)
 - Best judge of normal is to obtain contralateral comparison views

CLASSIFICATION

- Two Major Fracture Types:

- Extension:

- Gartland Classification (1959)
 - Wilkins Modification (1991)



95-98%
FOOSH

- Flexion: Considered separately



2-5%
Direct blow to
flexed elbow



Core Curriculum V5

GARTLAND CLASSIFICATION

- Fracture Type: Characteristic
 - Type 1: Nondisplaced
 - Type 2:
 - Angulation
 - Posterior hinge intact
 - Type 3:
 - Complete displacement
 - Loss of posterior hinge



GARTLAND CLASSIFICATION

- Type 1: Nondisplaced
 - Fat pad sign +
 - No angulation
 - +/- Impaction
- Treat with immobilization
 - Long-arm cast (LAC)
 - 3-4weeks



GARTLAND CLASSIFICATION

- Type 2:
 - Sagittal angulation
 - Posterior hinge intact
 - If anterior humeral line (AHL) does not intersect at least anterior 1/3rd of capitellum can require CR +/- PP

Anterior Humeral Line

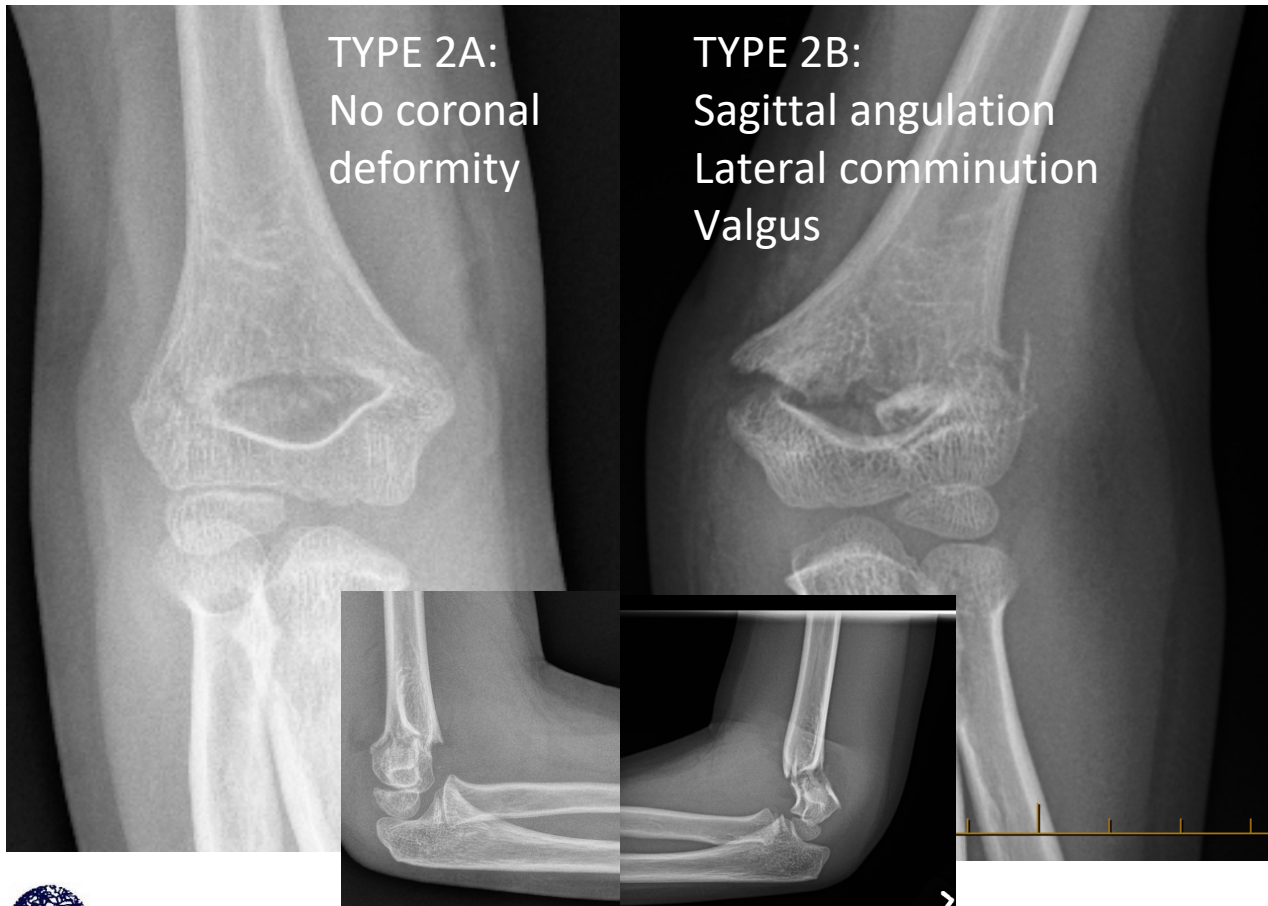


LAC ok



Needs CR

MODIFIED GARTLAND CLASSIFICATION



- Type 2A: Sagittal angulation only
 - Amenable to CR + LAC
 - Requires close follow-up
- Type 2B: + rotation, coronal angulation (varus, valgus), translation +/- comminution or impaction present
 - Higher rate of failure with CR without percutaneous pinning
 - Recommend CRPP

MODIFIED GARTLAND CLASSIFICATION

- Type 3:
 - Complete posterior displacement
 - Loss of posterior hinge
 - Maintains periosteal sleeve
- Type 4:
 - Instability in extension and flexion
 - Disruption of periosteal sleeve
- Type 3 vs. 4 based on fluoroscopic examination with patient under anesthesia
--> intraoperative distinction



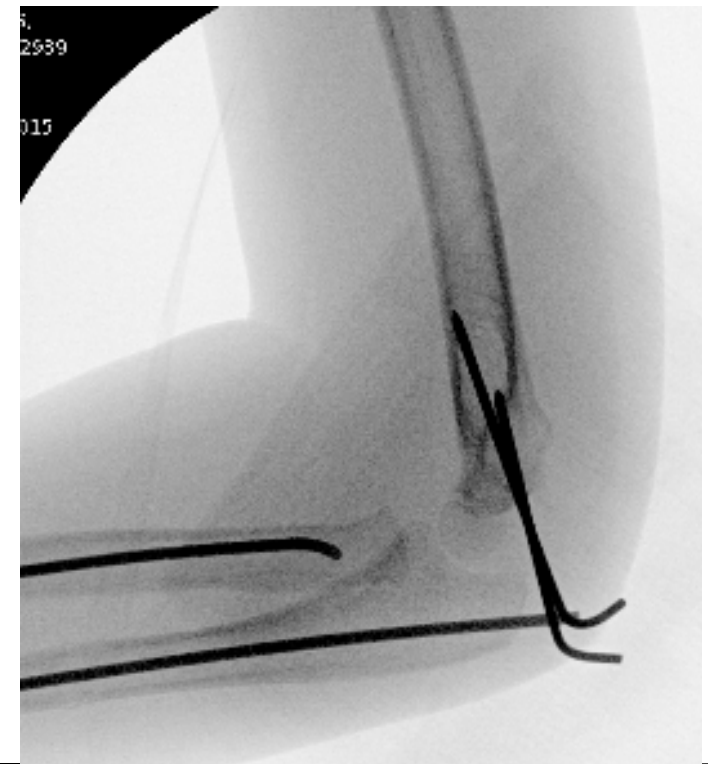
FLEXION TYPES

- Generally more unstable
- Higher complication rates
- Association with ulnar nerve palsy
- TREATMENT:
 - Any displacement --> CRPP
 - Higher rate of ORPP than extension types



IPSILATERAL FRACTURES

- Radius and/or Ulna (shaft or distal)
 - “Floating Elbow”
 - Occurs in 5% of Type 3s
 - Can be missed by distracting SCHF
 - Rate of complications proportional to severity of injury
 - Compartment syndrome rate 2%
 - Consider urgent fixation for higher energy injuries
 - Consider distal fixation if closed reduction required
 - Difficult to hold reduction in LAC with swelling

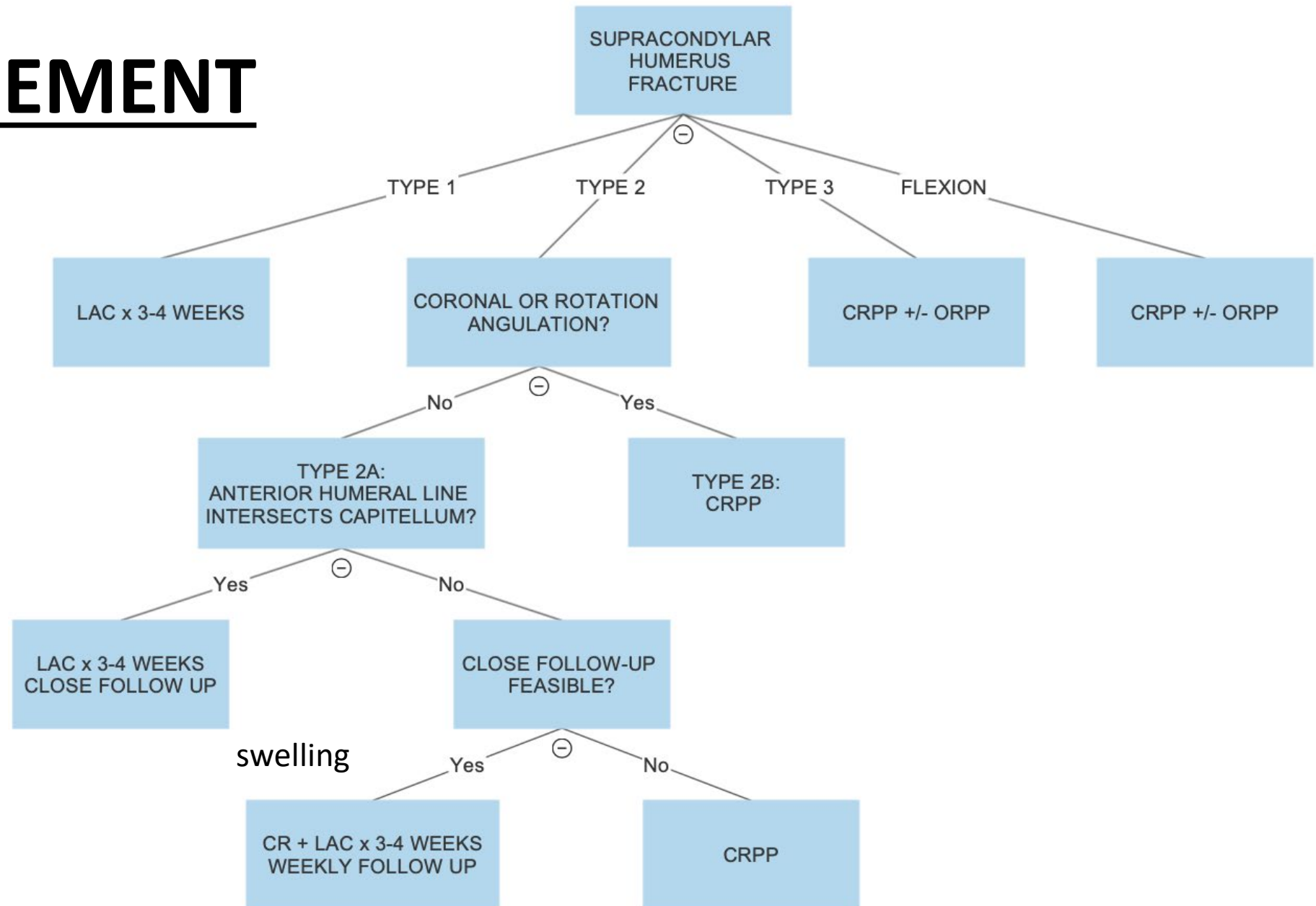


MANAGEMENT

- AAOS adopted appropriate use criteria (AUC) for the management of:
 - Pediatric supracondylar humerus fractures (2014)
 - Pediatric supracondylar humerus fractures with vascular injury (2015)
- Can be referenced in the treatment of a pediatric supracondylar humerus fracture.

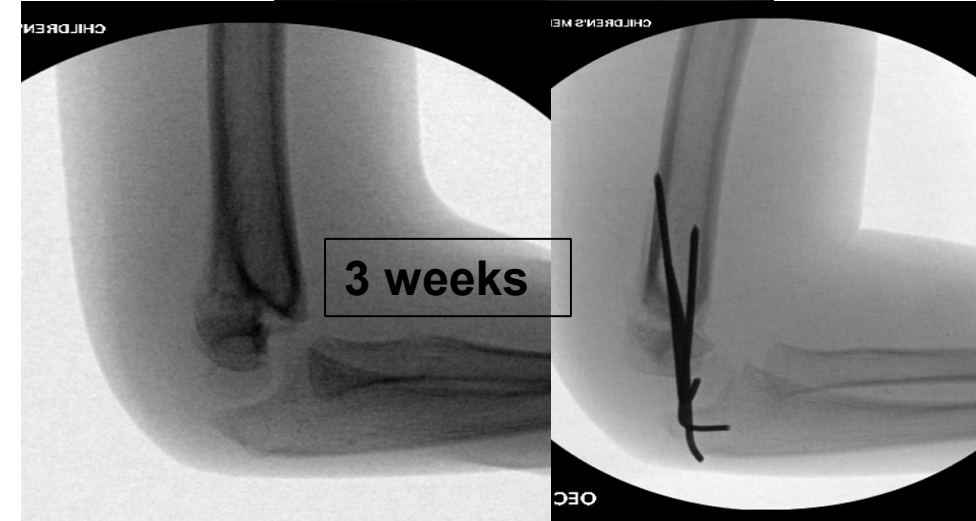


MANAGEMENT



NON OPERATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

- Avoid casting > 90 deg in swollen elbows
- Consider splitting cast
- Close follow-up
 - Especially for Type 2s
 - ***Especially*** if CR performed
 - Up to 48% rate of loss of reduction
 - Risk factors for displacement:
 - Greater initial displacement
 - Type 2B
 - Large arm (circumference)



TIMING OF OPERATIVE TREATMENT

- Dependent on:
 - Fracture pattern and displacement
 - Distal vascular status and limb perfusion
 - Neurologic function distal to the fracture
 - Soft tissue swelling
 - Associated fractures
 - Access to OR
- Type 2s can safely be treated as outpatients in delayed manner
- Type 3s should be admitted for monitoring if surgery is delayed

TIMING OF OPERATIVE TREATMENT

- Closed Type 3 SCHF with normal neurovascular exam can be treated safely in a delayed fashion
 - No difference in rates of:
 - Conversion to open reduction
 - Compartment syndrome
 - Iatrogenic nerve injury
 - Vascular complications
- Fractures with distal neurologic deficits are more controversial
 - May indicate more significant injury with increased risk of complications with delayed surgery

**over 21 hours in some studies*

TIMING OF OPERATIVE TREATMENT

- Emergent (immediately limb- or life- threatening)
 - NONPERFUSED limb
- Urgent
 - Open fractures
 - Skin puckering/compromise
 - Ipsilateral forearm/wrist fractures
 - Significant displacement and/or swelling
 - Neurologic injury?
 - Pulseless but perfused hand?



CLOSED REDUCTION AND PERCUTANEOUS PINNING SCHF

- <https://otaonline.org/video-library/45036/procedures-and-techniques/multimedia/17165284/closed-reduction-percutaneous-pinning-of-a>
- TECHNIQUE VIDEO with case example

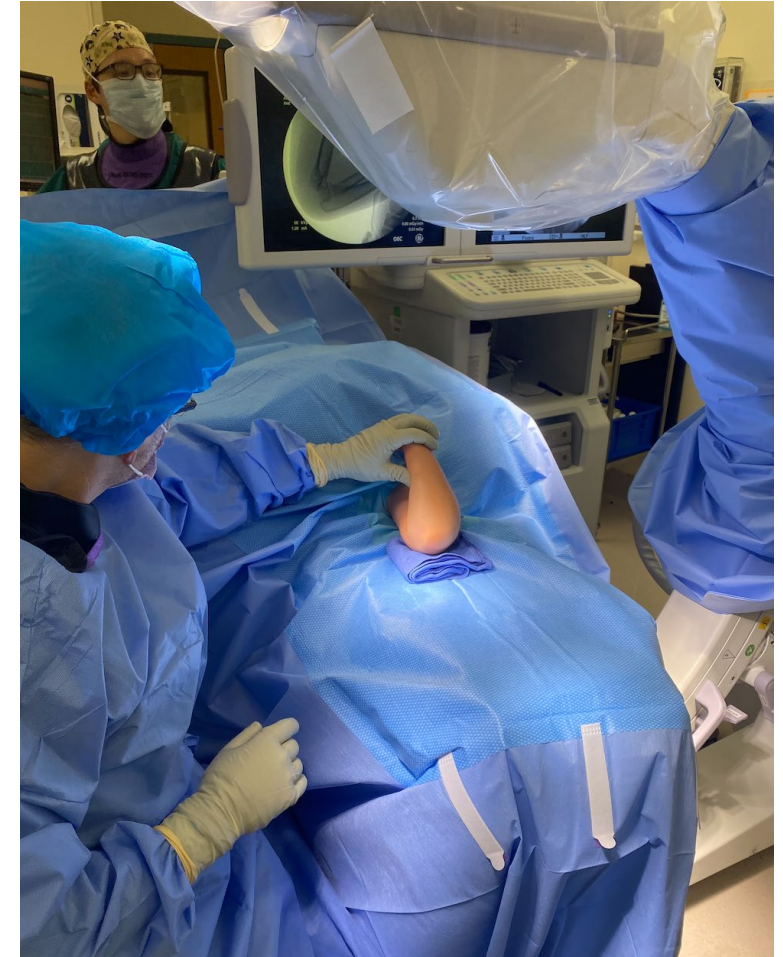
OR SETUP

- Armboard vs C-arm as table
 - Ability to swing through for lateral in very unstable reductions
- +/- Invert C-Arm
 - Increases radiation doses
 - Place lead over patient
- Secure head
 - Tape forehead
 - Tube tree



CLOSED REDUCTION

- Longitudinal traction to reestablish length
+/- milking maneuver
- Rotation correction
- Coronal plane correction
 - Translation
 - Varus/valgus
- Sagittal plane correction
 - Anterior translation and hyperflexion of distal segment with pressure on olecranon
- Forearm position
 - Hyperpronation vs Supination

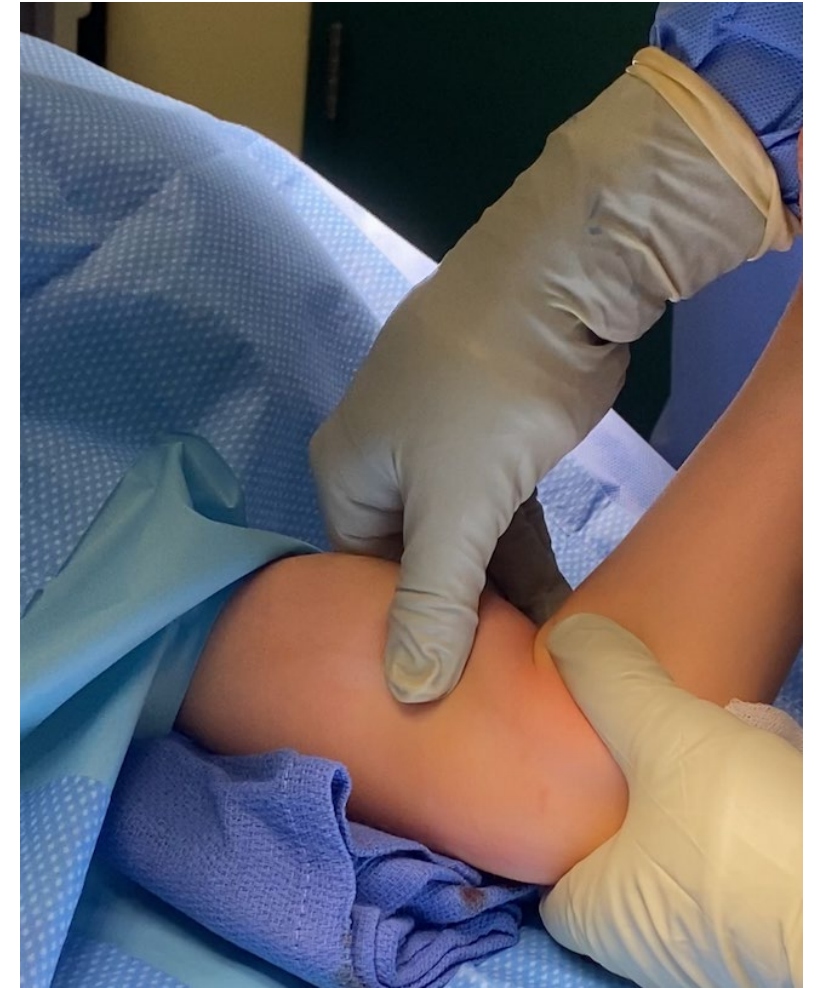


CLOSED REDUCTION

- Brachialis sign --> Milking maneuver



Courtesy of Mark Sinclair, MD



CLOSED REDUCTION

- Rule of Thumb:
 - Thumb points in direction of initial displacement of distal segment
 - Posteromedial
 - Pronation tightens medial soft-tissue sleeve
 - Posterolateral
 - Supination tightens lateral soft-tissue sleeve



DIFFICULT CLOSED REDUCTION

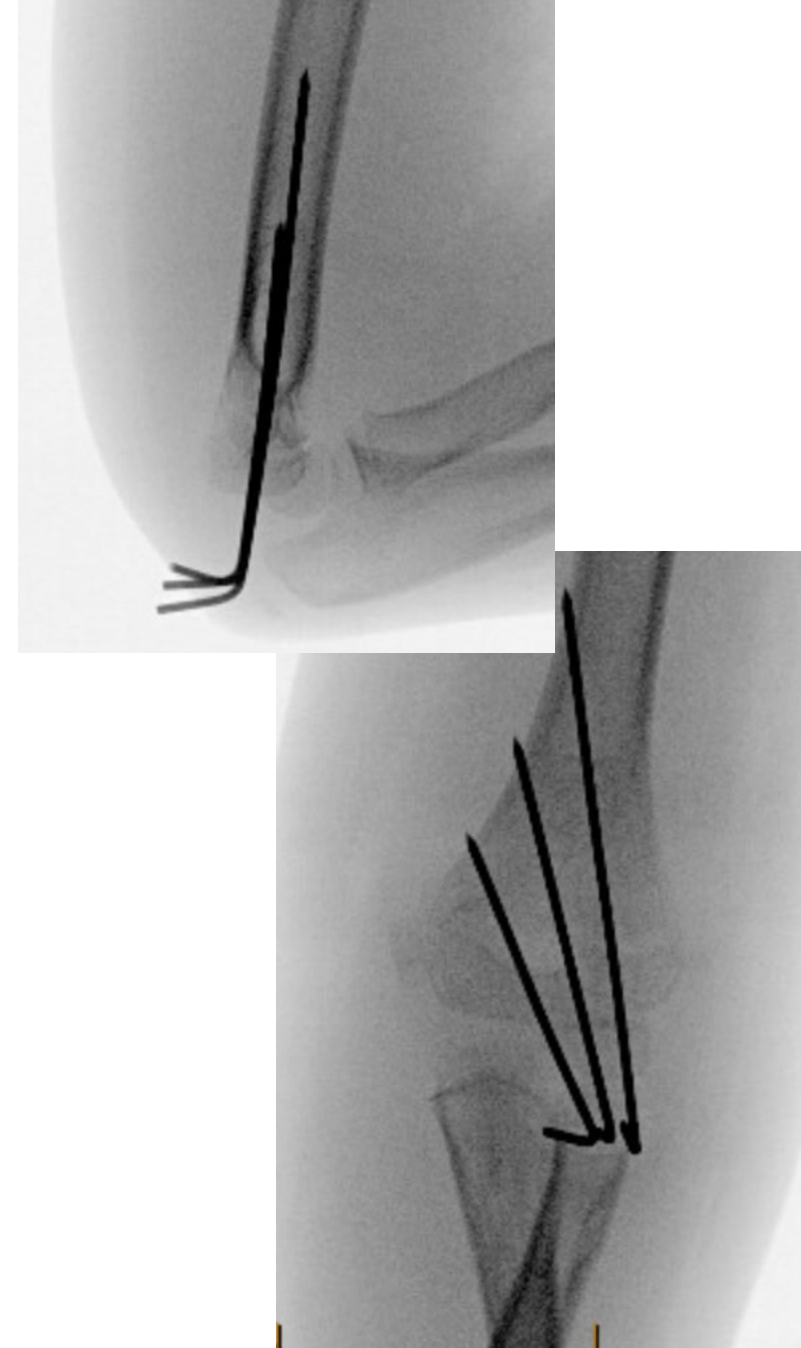
ex: Type 4 and Flexion Types

- Swing through laterals to avoid rotating through elbow
 - *advantage of using arm board
- Bump underneath the proximal fragment
- Lessen elbow flexion and/or apply posteriorly directed force to distal segment through forearm
- May use joystick pins in the distal fragment to help control and manipulate it



ACCEPTABLE ALIGNMENT

- Anterior humeral line intersects capitellum
- No significant gapping (suggestive of soft-tissue interposition)
- No clear parameters otherwise:
 - Avoid varus (increased Baumann's angle)
 - Mild rotational deformity acceptable
 - Slight valgus or translation better tolerated
 - Upper limit of acceptable undefined



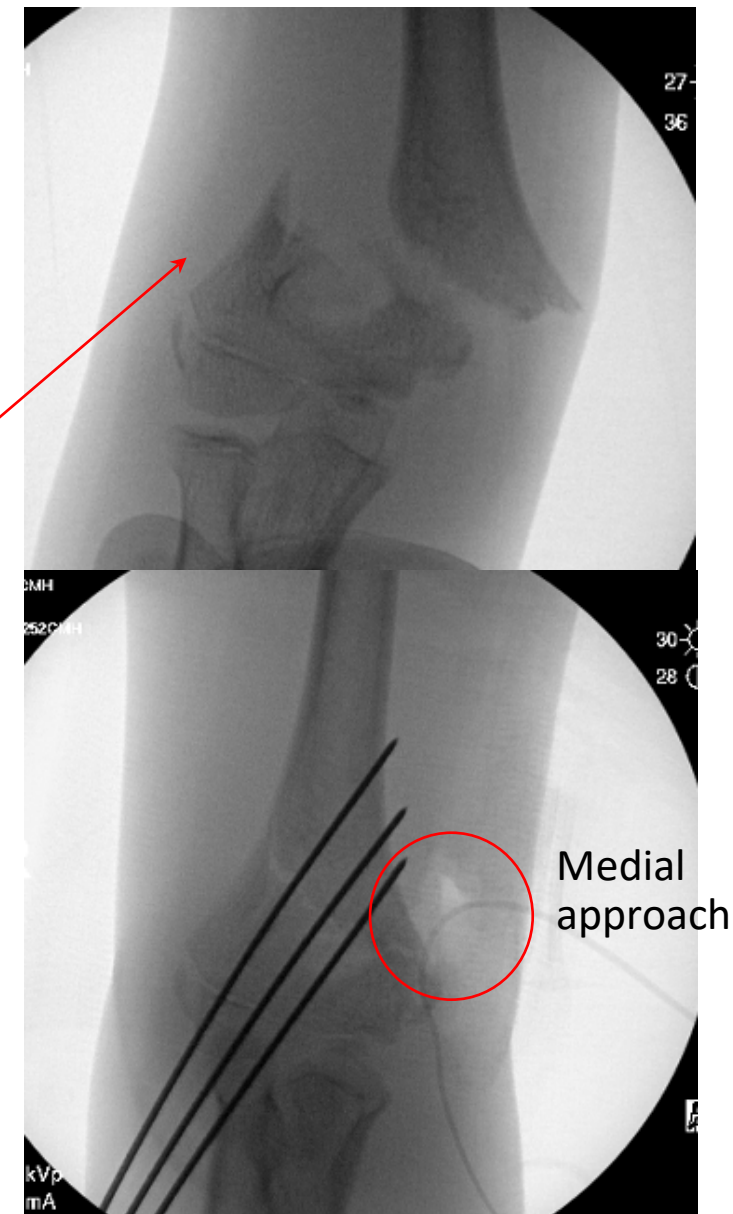
OPEN REDUCTION

- Variable rates in literature: 1-10%
- Indications:
 - Unable to achieve acceptable alignment
 - Association with posterolateral displacement
 - Flexion types
 - Open fracture
 - Vascular exploration required

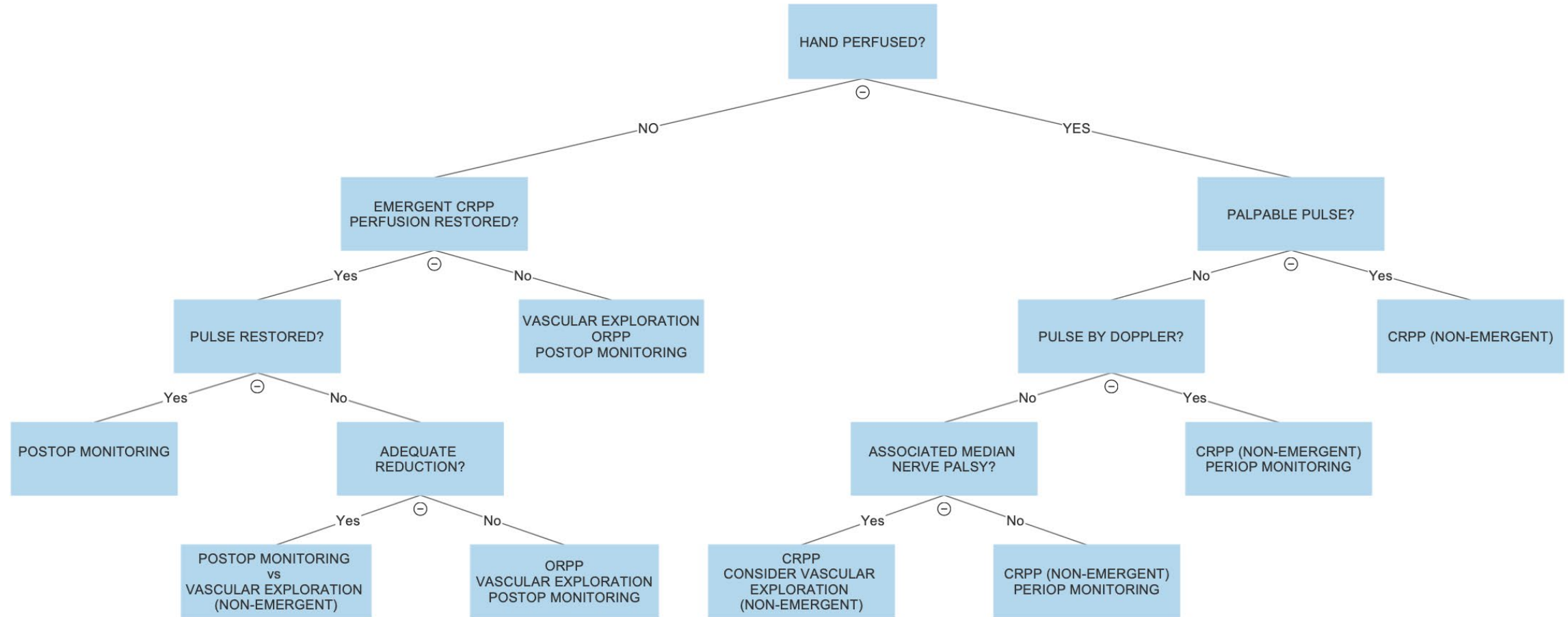


OPEN REDUCTION

- Choice of approach: follow metaphyseal spike
 - Anterior: posterior displacement or vascular injury and/or median nerve injury
 - Medial: Posterolateral displacement or flexion type injuries
 - Lateral: Posteromedial displacement
 - Posterior: Generally avoided; poorer outcomes (stiffness, AVN, cosmesis)
- Avoid compromised tissues
- Avoid further disruption of soft-tissues



MANAGEMENT OF VASCULAR INJURIES

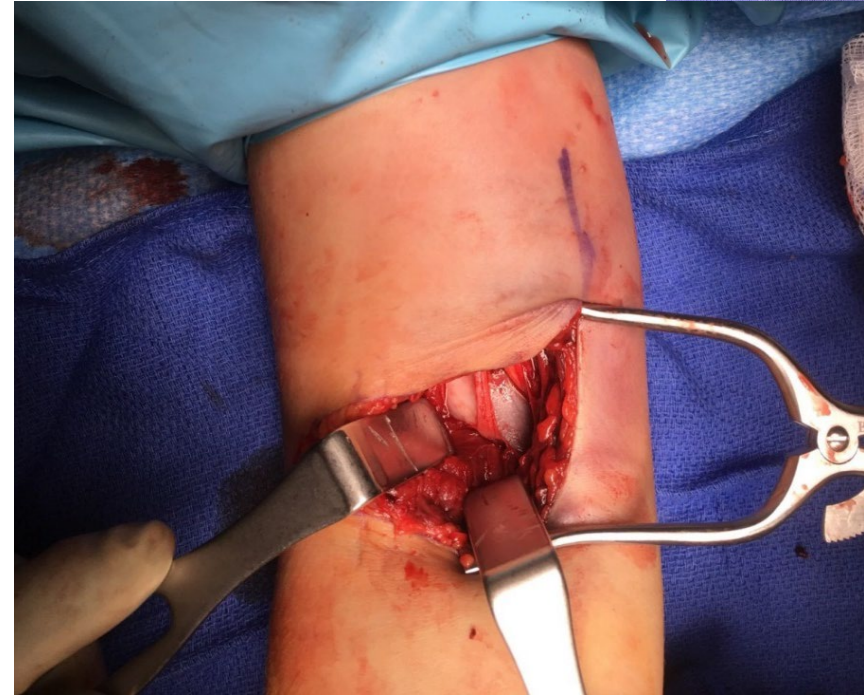


VASCULAR INJURY

- 1266 consecutive operatively treated supracondylar humerus fractures over 5 years (Texas Scottish Rite)
- 54 (4%) lacked a palpable radial pulse on admission
 - All Type 3s
- 5 (0.4%) were ischemic and underwent direct vascular repair
- 29/54 regained their radial pulse after CRPP of the fracture
- 20 were still pulseless after CRPP, but had perfused hands
 - 1/20 became ischemic and required vascular repair

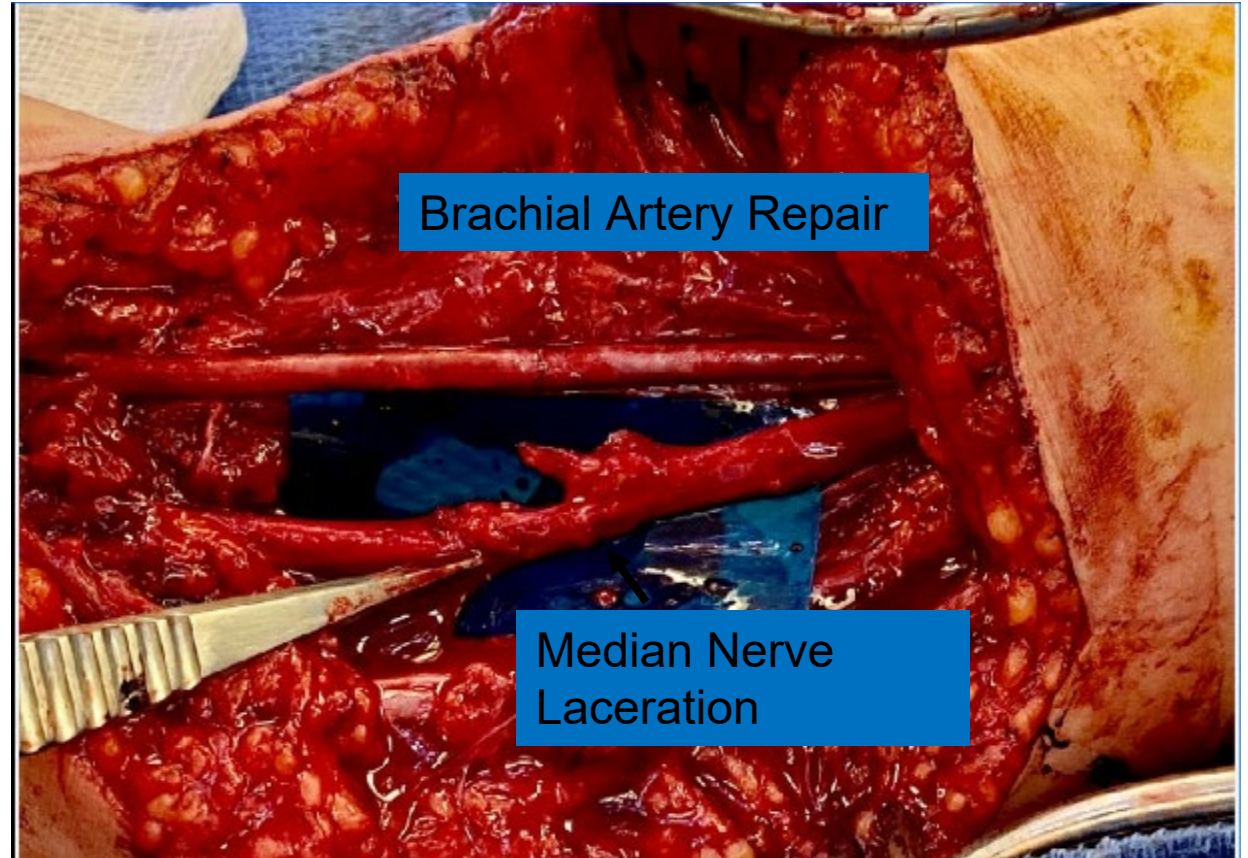
VASCULAR EXPLORATION

- Indications:
 - Persistent nonperfused hand after adequate CRPP
 - Loss of pulse after fracture reduction
 - Perfused pulseless associated with median nerve injury management controversial
 - To explore or not to explore?
- Anterior approach preferred
- Consider UE vascular surgeon consultation early



Courtesy of John Anderson, MD

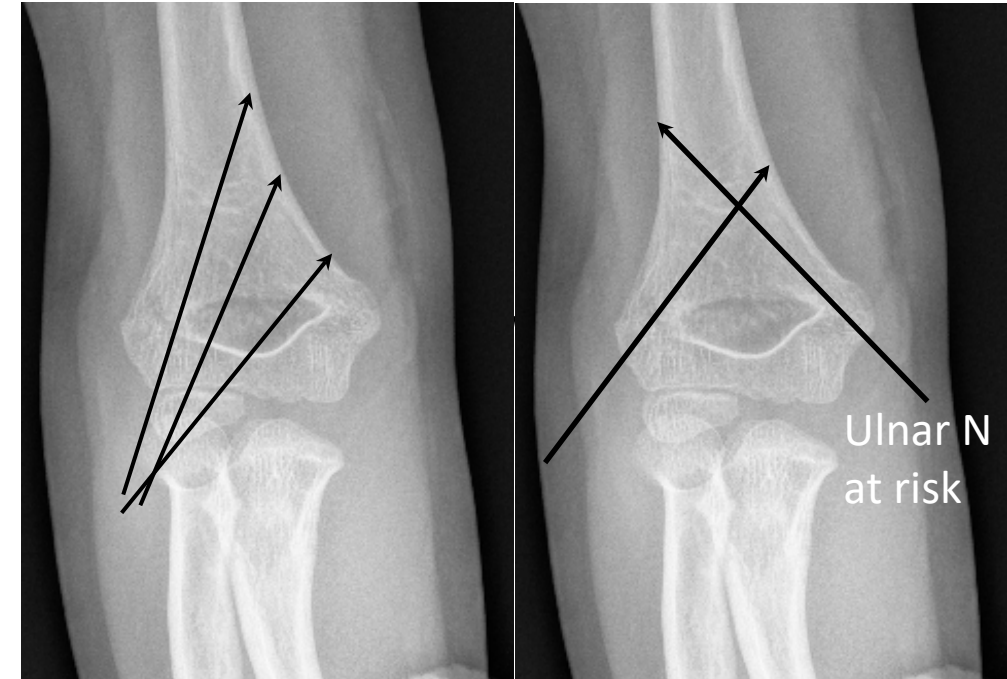
NEUROVASCULAR REPAIR



Courtesy of Micah Sinclair, MD

PIN CONFIGURATION OPTIONS

- **Laterally based**
 - ****MOST COMMON technique**
 - **2 vs 3 are lateral pins**
- **Cross-pinning**
 - Medial and Lateral
 - Ulnar nerve at risk
 - All-Lateral
 - Radial nerve at risk
 - Less commonly used
- **Antegrade ESIN technique also described**
 - High SCH fx

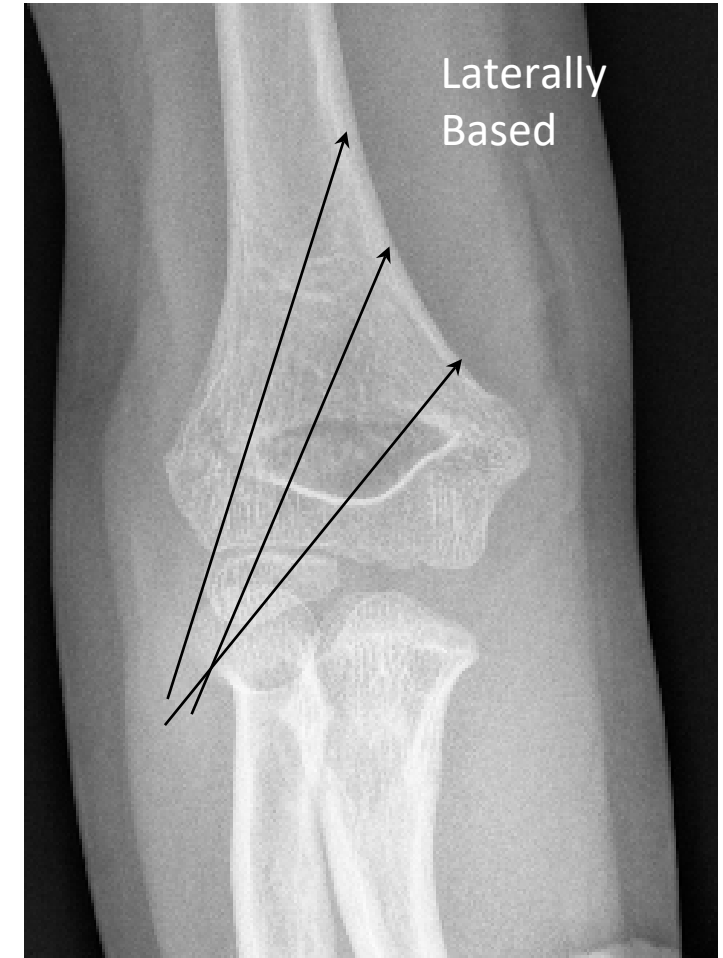


PIN CONFIGURATION OPTIONS

- Laterally based
 - ****MOST COMMON technique**
 - 2 vs 3 laterally-based pins

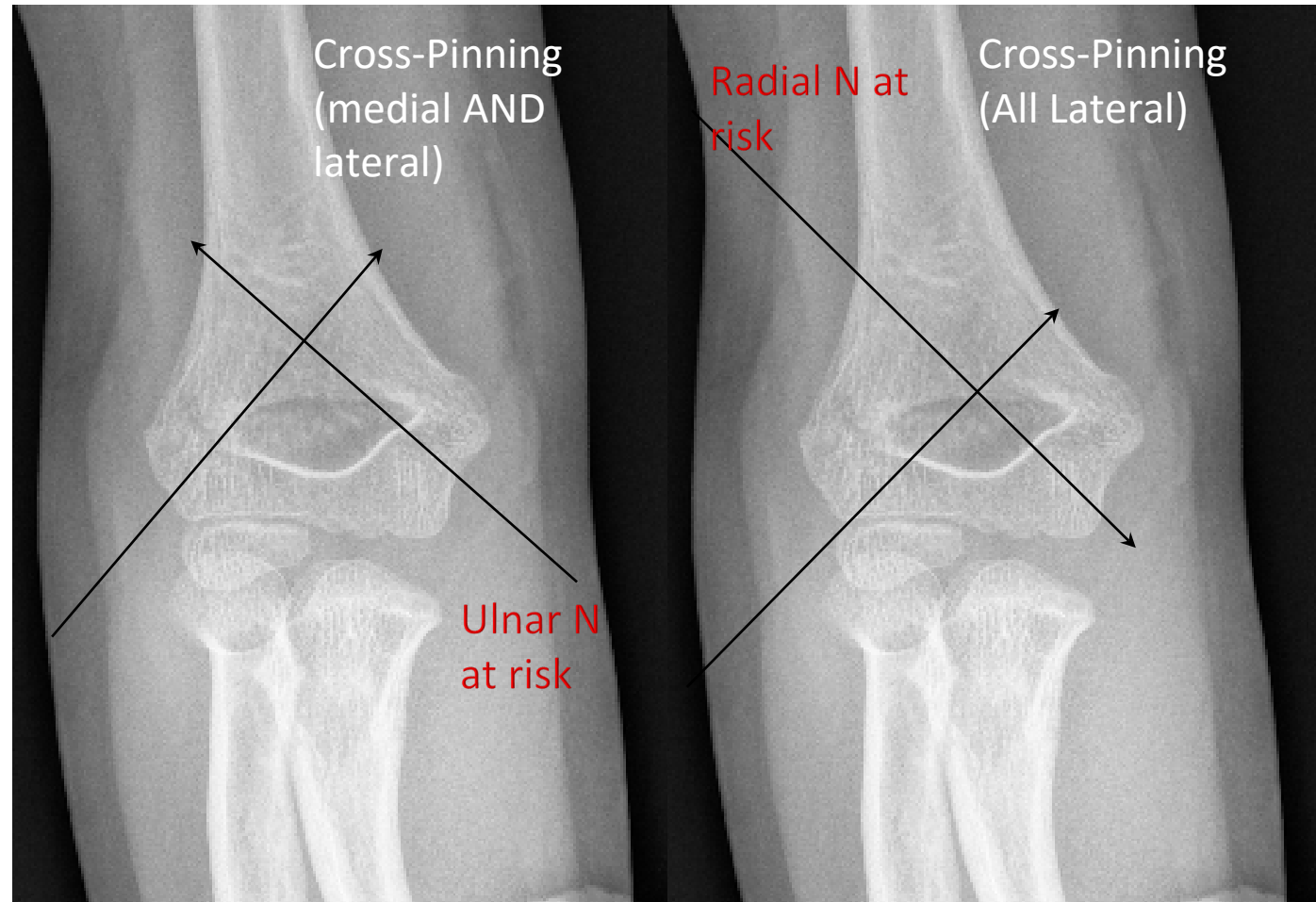
NB: Antegrade ESIN technique also described but less common

- High SCH fx



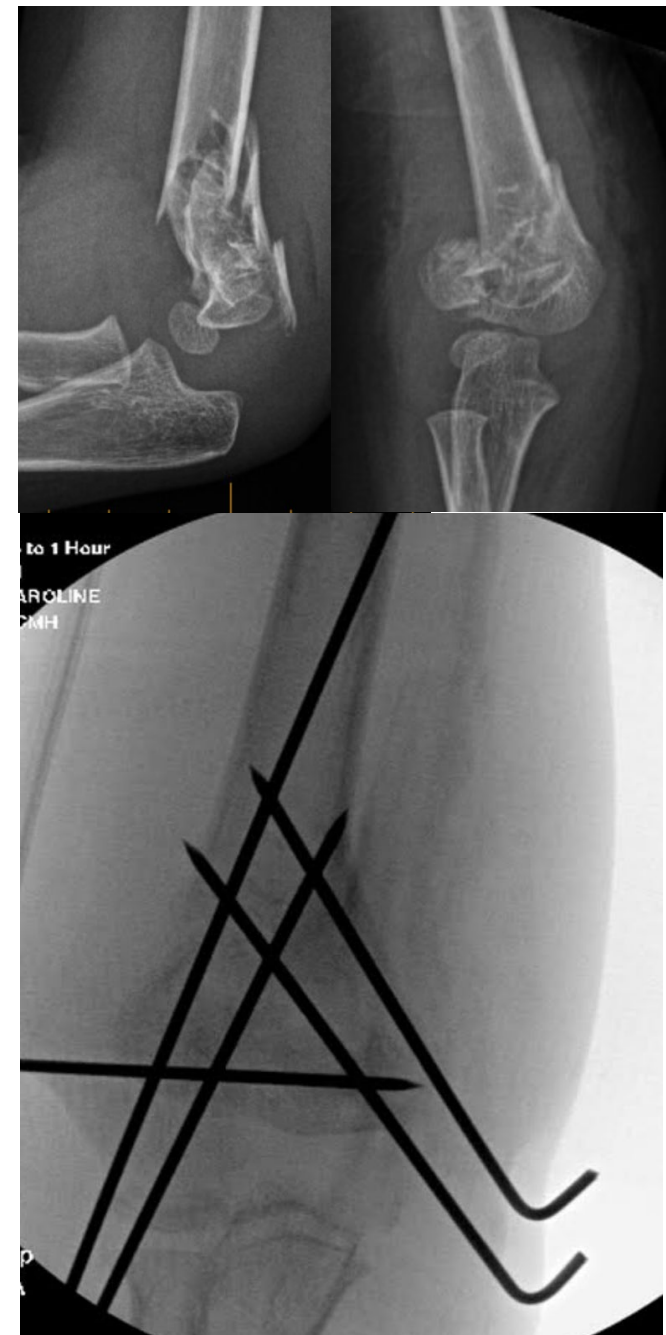
PIN CONFIGURATION OPTIONS...

- Cross-pinning
 - Medial and Lateral
 - Ulnar nerve at risk
 - All-Lateral
 - Radial nerve at risk



PIN CONFIGURATION

- Cross-pinning most stable biomechanically
- No clear CLINICAL advantage to cross pinning over lateral pinning for most Type 3 fractures with
 - Greater risk of iatrogenic ulnar nerve injury (4.3X)
- Indications for medial pin:
 - Medial comminution
 - Proximal medial to distal lateral oblique fracture pattern (reverse oblique)
 - Intra-articular variants



PIN CONFIGURATION

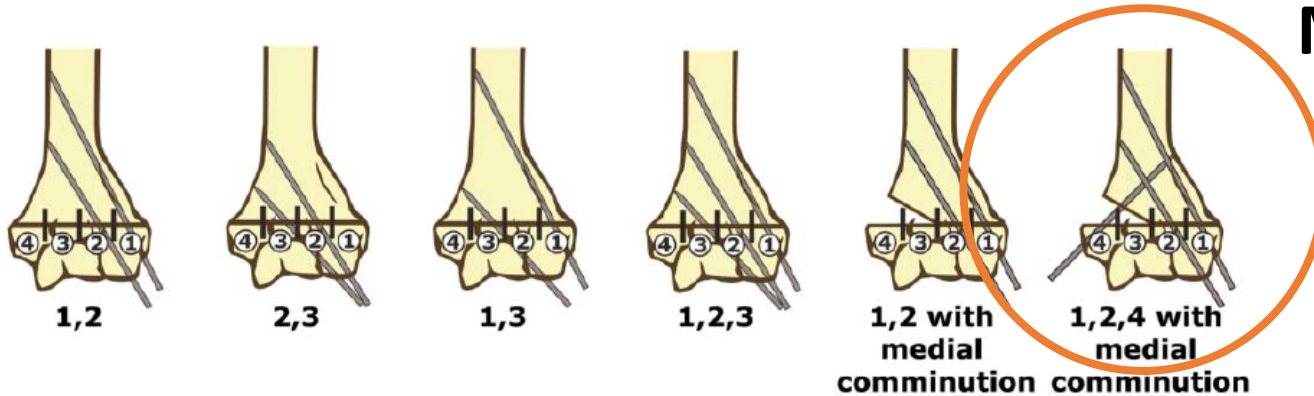


FIGURE 1. The transverse distance between the medial and lateral epicondyles was divided evenly in 4 different zones, with the most lateral zone labeled as zone 1 and the most medial zone labeled as zone 4. In the absence of medial comminution, 4 possible lateral-only pin configurations were tested. In the presence of medial comminution, 2 possible pin configurations were tested.

Silva M, Knutsen AR, Kalma JJ, et al. Biomechanical Testing of Pin Configurations in Supracondylar Humeral Fractures: The Effect of Medial Column Comminution. Journal of Orthopaedic Trauma: May 2013 - Volume 27 - Issue 5 - p 275-280

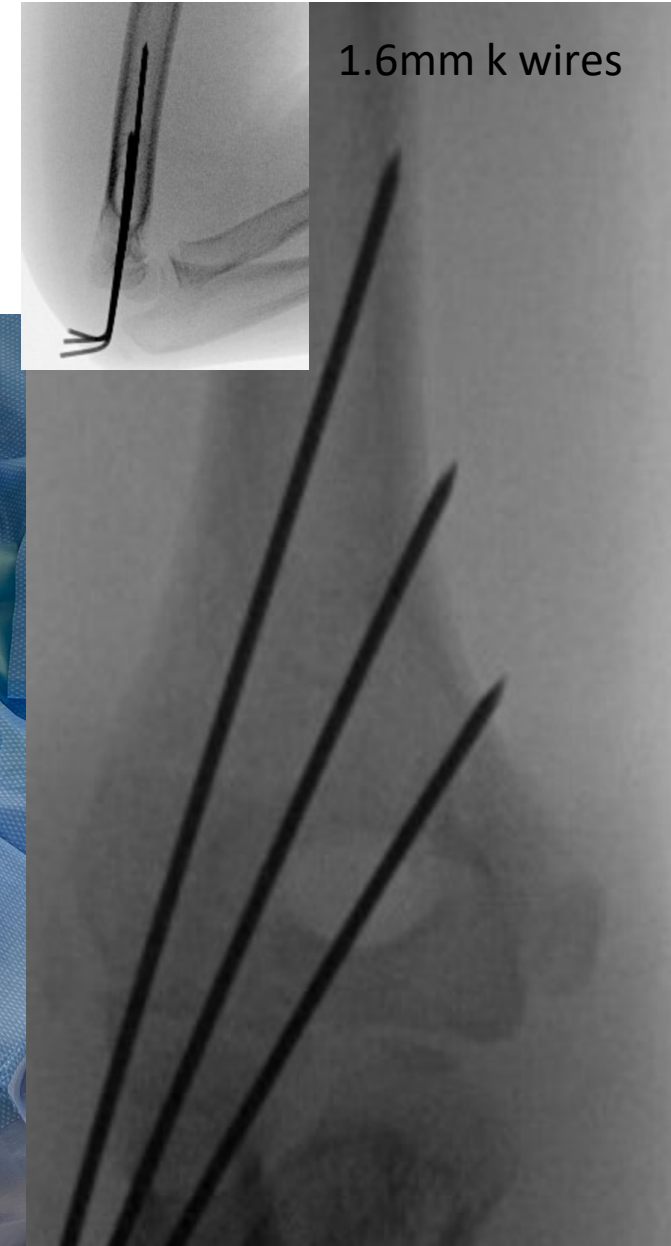
Medial Pin Technique:

- Fix with 2 lateral pins
- Extend elbow 45deg to relax ulnar nerve
 - Beware of ulnar nerve subluxation
 - 16% of children (Zaltz 1996)
- Thumb pressure or small incision to protect ulnar nerve as pins inserted

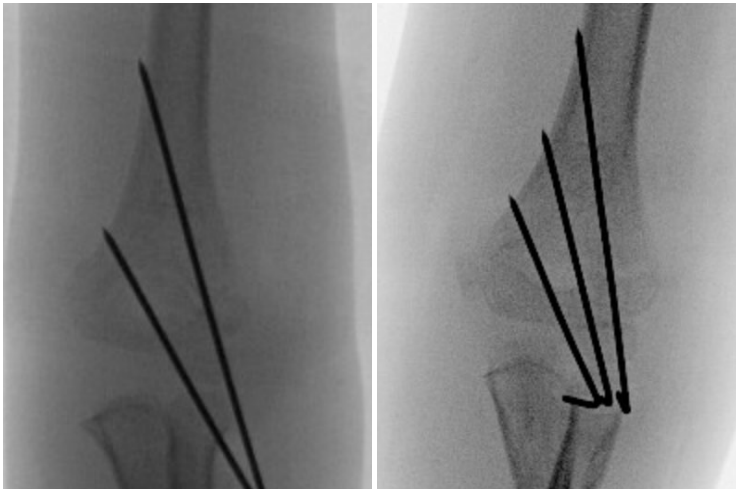
If iatrogenic nerve palsy postop, controversy re: leave or remove pin

PERCUTANEOUS PINNING

- IDEALLY:
 - 1.6-2mm k-wires
 - Engage lateral and medial columns
 - Divergent
 - *Greater pin spread = Greater stability



Type 2A:
2 pins



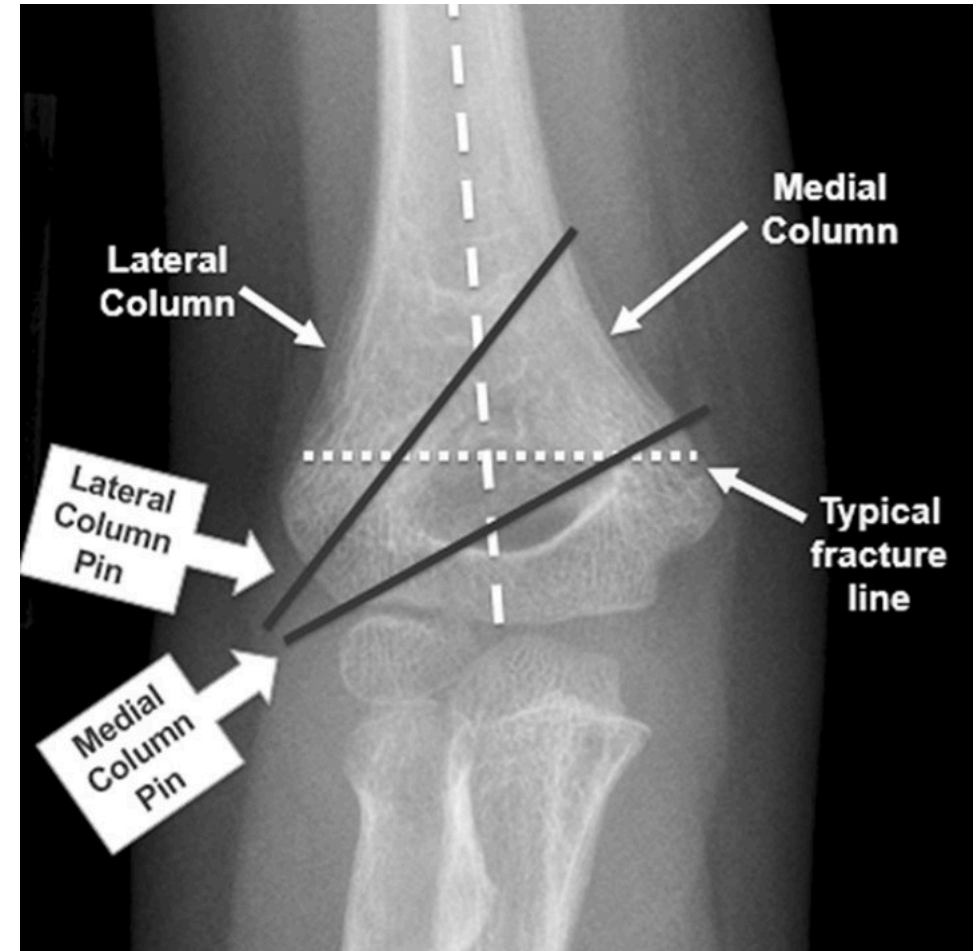
Type 2B: 2-3 pins

Type 3:
3 pins



PIN CONSTRUCT

- Wide spread at fracture site
- Control lateral column with pin along metaphyseal flare
- Control medial column with laterally based pin
 - Engage distal humerus just above fracture site
- *A 3rd pin can be added between these two for additional stability*



FLUOROSCOPY

- After stable reduction and pinning:
 - Review AP alignment with elbow extended
 - Obtain true lateral view to assess alignment
 - Oblique views to assess reduction of medial and lateral columns
- Consider stress views under fluoroscopy to assess stability of construct/reduction
 - *Especially if considering limited follow-up
 - On AP: rotational stress, varus/valgus stress
 - On LAT: flexion/extension arc

Bauer JM, et al. JPO 2019



POSTOPERATIVE CARE

- Type 2: Outpatient
- Type 3: Monitoring for 12-24h
 - NV exams
 - Compartment checks
- Split cast or splint
 - Especially if acute or early discharge
- Pain control:
 - Ibuprofen + Acetaminophen often sufficient
 - Narcotics may not be necessary



POSTOPERATIVE ANALGESIA

- n = 81 Type 2 & 3 SCHF --> CRPP
- Pain levels decreased to clinically unimportant levels by POD 3
- Rx of 7 opioid doses postop should be sufficient
- Pain scores >6 after d/c are outliers and should be screened for compartment syndrome or ischemia

FOLLOW UP

- Pin removal generally at 3-4 weeks
- Frequency of follow-up variable per surgeon and/or fracture type
- PT/ROM exercises generally not required
- Post-pin removal radiographs may not provide clinical utility in the absence of other clinical findings.

COMPLICATIONS

- Pin site infections
- Loss of fixation, pin migration
- Malunion
 - Cubitus varus - thought to be only esthetic, however may contribute to loss of motion and posterolateral rotatory instability
- Nonunion: very rare
- Stiffness: uncommon long term

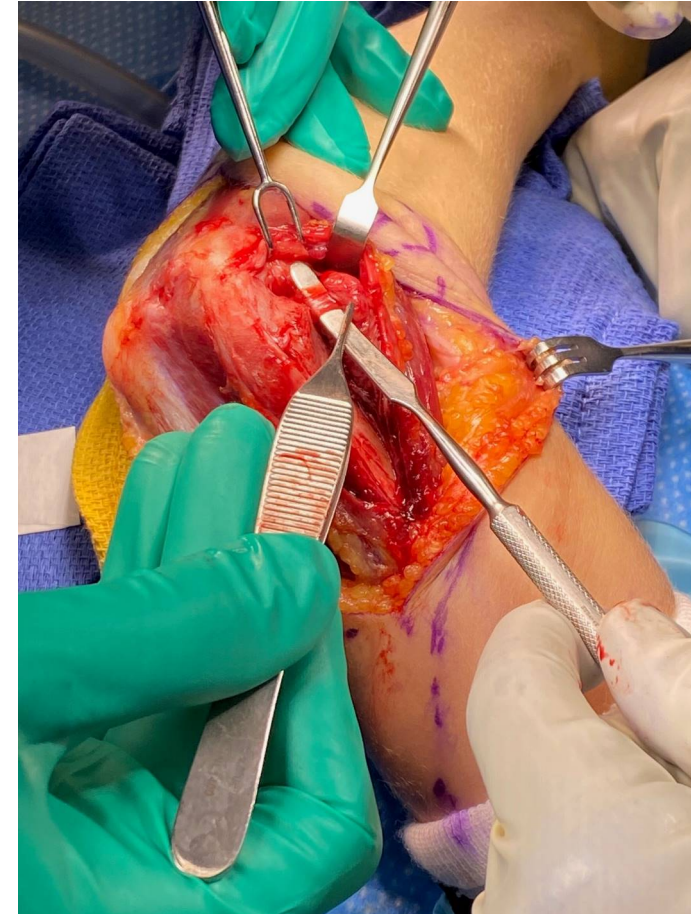


Courtesy of Mark Sinclair, MD

COMPLICATIONS

- Nerve injury
 - Traumatic
 - Mostly neuropraxias with full recovery
 - Nerve transection is rare
 - Prolonged deficit (>6 months) may be due to perineural fibrosis (neurolysis helpful)
 - Iatrogenic from pin placement or entrapment in fracture during reduction
- Vascular injury
- Compartment syndrome (rare)
 - Increased risk with “floating elbow”
 - Can lead to Volkmann ischemic contracture

Perineural fibrosis



Courtesy of Micah Sinclair, MD

SUMMARY - SCHF

- Very common pediatric elbow injury
- Careful pre-operative neurovascular exam is essential
- Don't miss ipsilateral fractures (the “floating elbow”)
- Closed reduction and casting possible for Type 2A fractures
- Close follow-up for some nonoperatively treated fractures
- Surgical timing only emergent if vascular compromise
- Surgical treatment generally some variation of CRPP
- Variation in the approach to managing pediatric SCHF

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