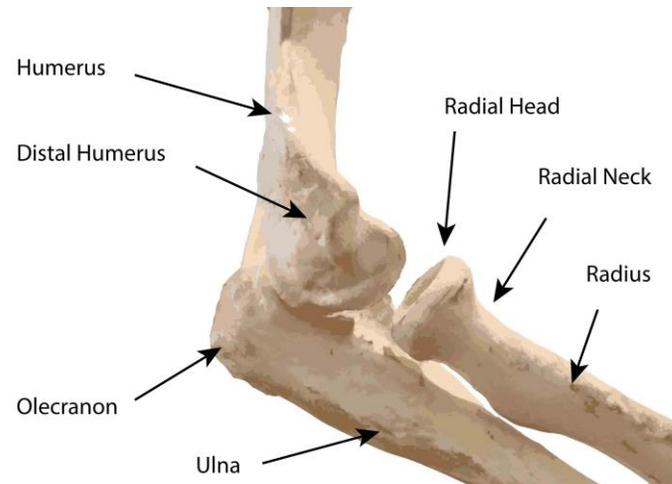


Elbow Arthroscopy: A Guide to Recovery After Surgery

Arthroscopic Elbow Surgery is done to examine the elbow joint and to do surgery such as 'clean up' the joint, remove pieces of bone or tissue, or address other problems such as a stiff or arthritic elbow.



During the surgery, a lighted telescopic lens called an "arthroscope" is inserted directly into the elbow joint to look at the joint surfaces. Several small cuts are made in the skin in order to place the arthroscope and surgical instruments. Sometimes, a larger cut is made to do a repair without the telescope.

Elbow arthroscopy is performed in the operating room under general anesthesia. The surgery typically takes between 45-90 min. The surgery is day care surgery, meaning you go home the same day as the surgery.

Avoiding stiffness or loss of motion is very important after elbow surgery. The elbow joint can easily become stiff. Working on Range of Motion exercises is very important to minimize stiffness.

Going Home:

- Arrange to have someone take you home after surgery, even if you are taking a taxi

Bathing:

- Keep your dressings dry for the first 2 days after surgery. Cleanse around the area or use a plastic bag sealed with duct tape to keep the dressings dry.
- If the dressings get wet, change them
- If your wound does not have any fluid coming out of it, you may get the wound wet in the shower 2 days after surgery unless your surgeon tells you otherwise
- You may bathe or swim 2-3 weeks after surgery, if the wound is healed and dry

Care of your Incision & Wound:

- The tensor band should be snug but not too tight. If the tensor is applied too tight (causes tingling or change in skin colour), loosen and reapply
- If the tensor is too loose, take it off and re-wrap it snugly
- To reapply tensor, start in the forearm and work your way up above the elbow
- If you want to get your arm wet in the shower, you may do so 2 days after surgery if the wound is dry
- Take the dressing off before you shower and put a new dressing on after your shower

How to change your dressings:

- Wash your hands with soap & water before you take care of your wound
- Remove tensor bandage

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- Throw out the white gauze bandages—the dressings will be stained with blood - and remove the white mepore dressings.
- Do not remove the Steri-Strips- small tapes that are right on top of the wound. They will fall off themselves.
- Shower but do not let the wound sit in water
- Cover wounds with new dressing. Apply new 'mepore' or waterproof 'aquacell' dressing.
- You can use bandaids to cover the small (1-2 cm) wounds
- Buy 'mepore' dressings at pharmacy. You must apply a new mepore dressing after each shower.
- Buy waterproof 'aquacell' dressing at One Bracing @ Rebalance^{MD}. You may shower with the aquacell dressing on.
- After you change your dressing, you may put the tensor back on starting to wrap the arm at the wrist then work your way up
- The tensor band should be snug but not too tight. If the tensor is applied too tight (causes tingling or change in skin colour), loosen and reapply
- If the tensor is too loose, take it off and re-wrap it snugly
- Make sure to remove the tensor bandage while exercising the elbow

Activity:

- Use your arm and elbow as directed by your surgeon. Most patients are told to use the elbow as tolerated after the surgery.
- Do not wear a sling for more than 3-7 days unless your surgeon specifically tells you too. Slings can lead to elbow stiffness. A sling may be used in the first few days after surgery to help with pain.

- Gradually resume normal activities like walking; recovery is gradual and it is normal to feel weak and tired for a couple of weeks after surgery
- Unless otherwise instructed, begin the elbow Range of Motion exercises that are shown on the last page of this handout below within a day or two of surgery.
- Your surgeon will tell you if physiotherapy is recommended. Many patients benefit from physiotherapy after elbow arthroscopy and it can usually be started within a few days of surgery.

Pain:

- Discomfort will be moderate for the first few days and will gradually get better
- Use any pain medications as prescribed by your surgeon
- Gradually reduce your pain medications as your pain decreases

Swelling

- Expect swelling for a few weeks following the surgery. This is due to fluid that was introduced into the joint during surgery and inflammation. The swelling is often worse in the hand.
- When resting, sit with the arm limb supported with pillows and elevate the hand above the elbow and the elbow to the level of your heart.

Icing:

- Apply ice packs or use a Cryo Therapy 'Ice Machine' to reduce pain and swelling.
- Cryotherapy "Ice Machines": are an alternative to ice packs. They can be extremely helpful to reduce pain and swelling. These can be bought at One Bracing @

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Rebalance^{MD} or other medical supply stores such as McGill & Orme, Island Orthotics and others.

- Apply ice for 10-15 minutes, 4-6 times per day
- Never apply ice directly to skin

Return to Work:

- When you are able to return to work depends on:
 - the kind of job you have and its physical demands
 - how much pain & swelling you have after your injury
 - how your recovery is progressing
 - if you are able to modify your job or work from home
- Your surgeon will help you decide when to return to work
- Expect to take off at least 2-4 weeks for a desk job that does not require much use of both hands
- Expect to take off 2-4 months for more physically demanding work

Healthy Eating:

- Start with clear fluids after surgery
- Gradually increase to a well balanced diet as your appetite allows
- Drink at least 6 cups of fluids daily

Smoking:

- Smoking causes problems with the healing of bones and tissues
- Not smoking or smoking less in the 2 months before surgery and for 3-6 months after surgery will reduce the chance of a problem with healing
- visit www.quitnow.ca for information about tools and medications to help you quit smoking

Going to the Bathroom:

- Changes in medications, activity and diet can cause constipation (hard, dry bowel movements)
- To avoid constipation: drink lots of fluids, eat high fibre foods such as prunes, fruits, bran, whole grains and vegetables
- Take a stool softener or laxative if needed. Ask your surgeon or pharmacist to suggest one.

Driving:

- Do not drive while taking pain medications
- Discuss with your surgeon when it is safe to drive but expect that it will not be safe for you to drive for at least two weeks after surgery.
- If your ability to safely drive (e.g swerve sharply, perform an emergency stop) is impaired, your insurance may not be valid in the case of an accident

Your Medications:

- Resume your regular medications unless instructed otherwise by your surgeon

Follow Up Appointment:

- A post-operative appointment should be scheduled for approximately 10-14 days post surgery
- Call the office if you do not have an appointment scheduled
- Write down your questions for the surgeon before the appointment

Call your Surgeon if you have:

- Increasing pain or swelling that is not relieved by elevation, ice and pain medications

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- Incisions that are red, puffy, hot or leaking fluid more than 48 hrs after surgery
- Fever greater than 38°C
- Signs of circulation problems (e.g coolness, change in skin colour, numbness) which is not relieved by rest, elevation and loosening the tensor bandage
- Persistent nausea and vomiting
- Inability to pass urine for more than 8-10 hours
- Bleeding that continues even after applying direct pressure to the area for 15 minutes.

If you cannot reach your Surgeon:

- Call your family surgeon, go to a walk-in clinic or hospital emergency department

Non-emergency health information and services:

- HealthLinkBC www.healthlinkBC.ca
- Tel: 811 from anywhere in BC
- Tel: 711 for deaf and hearing impaired assistance (TTY)

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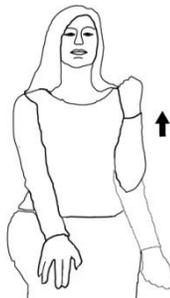
Exercising the Elbow

Spend 15 minutes 3 times a day exercising your elbow. You can begin these exercises within a day or two of the surgery unless your surgeon tells you otherwise.

- Ice your elbow before and after exercises to reduce pain
- Sit upright in comfortable position to do the exercises.
- Do not wear a sling while doing the exercises.
- Remove your tensor bandage before doing exercises.

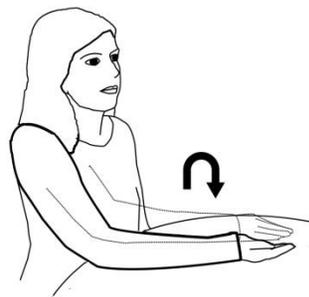
1. Elbow Bending (Flexion) and Straightening (Extension):

Bend your elbow to a comfortable level, hold for 5 seconds. Straighten your elbow and hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.



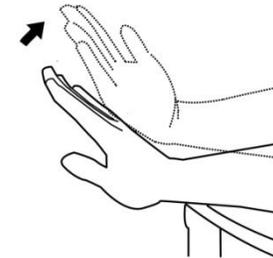
2. Forearm Rotation (Pronation & Supination)

Support your arm on a table. Making sure to keep your elbow tucked into your side, turn your palm up as far as is comfortable. Hold for 5 seconds. Turn the palm down as far as is comfortable. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.



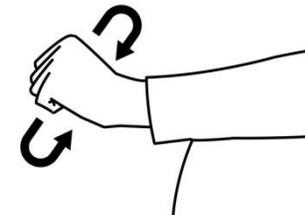
3. Wrist Bending (Flexion & Extension)

Support your arm on a table, hand over the edge and palm facing down. Raise your hand up to extend the wrist as far as is comfortable. Hold for 5 seconds. Turn the palm up and flex the wrist up as far as is comfortable. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.



4. Wrist Rotation

Support your arm on table. Move your wrist in a circle in a clockwise direction. Repeat 10 times. Then move wrist in a counter clockwise circle. Repeat 10 times.



The information in this handout is intended only for the person it was given to by the health care team. It does not replace the advice or direction given to you by your surgeon.