

Post-Operative Elbow Rehabilitation

These multidisciplinary guidelines form the basis of a progressive rehabilitation programme. These are general guidelines for the most common elbow surgical procedures and are not designed to replace sound clinical reasoning. Any specific instructions from the consultant orthopaedic team either verbally or in post-operative notes must take precedence.

Rehabilitation goals

- Preserve the integrity of surgical repair
- Restoration of functional range of movement
- Restore proprioceptive acuity
- Prevent compensatory movement patterns that may compromise recovery

Principles of post-operative elbow rehabilitation

The following should be considered at all times throughout the rehabilitation process:

- Good communication with the consultant team is paramount to a successful outcome for the patient.
- Comprehensive pain control should be in place and supported prior to discharge from hospital. Patients should be educated regarding appropriate levels of pain, particularly in response to exercise to reduce fear and anxiety.
- Cervical spine, shoulder, wrist and hand activity should be maintained throughout.
- Quality of movement should not be sacrificed in the pursuit of range.
- Progression should follow the basic principles of rehabilitation from passive (PROM), active assisted (AAROM), active (AROM), isometric and resistance training.
- Rehabilitation programmes should only include 2-4 exercises. Too many exercises will affect adherence.
- Consider using short lever movements or closed kinetic chain (CKC) positions in appropriate situations.
- Consider incorporating functional movements whenever possible – for example use of the hand for specific occupational or sports activities.
- Functional milestones are for guidance only. Patients should not be accelerated through time markers without discussion with a member of the consultant team. Similarly, range, control and strength goals must be met before patients are deemed ready for progression, regardless of whether or not they have reached the time marker.
- The law states that patients **MUST** be in full control of a car before returning to driving. It is the patient's responsibility to ensure this and to inform their insurance company of their surgery.

Acute distal biceps repair

	Day 0	0-2 weeks	2-4 weeks	4-6 weeks	6-12 weeks	12weeks +
Advise	Sling /collar & cuff for 2/52. Bulky bandage to remain in place until stitches trimmed / removed in clinic Neck / shoulder / wrist / hand movements	Continue with sling/collar & cuff as instructed Continue with neck / shoulder / wrist / hand movements	Remove sling Light activities only should be performed to work on ROM Not to lift more than 20kg.	Light activities only should be performed to work on ROM Not to lift more than 20kg.	Progress ROM Progressive resistance work commenced.	Progress functional active range of movement, strength and endurance Progress kinetic chain integration Return to work/sport – from 12-24 weeks depending on requirements
Avoid	AVOID:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy lifting and contact sports 					

Key clinical points

- Patients with rapid progression and little pain must be educated to avoid premature loading.
- Strength exercises should only be introduced in accordance with the principles of rehabilitation, for example:
 - Ability to perform a movement with the correct movement pattern
 - The patient being able to maintain good rotator cuff and scapula control
 - Evidence that movement can be performed without compensatory muscle patterning