

# Distal bicep tendon repair

## Information for patients

This booklet contains information about your elbow injury. It will help you to understand what the injury means and how we plan to help you recover with physiotherapy rehabilitation.

# Distal bicep tendon rupture – what is the problem?

The biceps muscle bends the elbow and rotates the forearm. The muscle is attached to the forearm bone (radius) by its tendon. Tendon overuse, overstrain or more usually acute injury can lead to the biceps tendon being pulled off the bone at the elbow. This tendon rupture can be very painful and may mean you struggle to continue with the job and hobbies that you were used to before your injury. Surgeons may therefore suggest an operation to repair the tendon so you can make a better recovery and return to all your normal activities.

# Distal bicep tendon rupture – surgery

The tendon is reattached onto the forearm bone with an anchorage device, and this can come in several forms. We use a device called an Endobutton. You will have a small incision over the forearm, where the biceps should attach onto the bone. Another incision higher up the arm may sometimes be required to find the retracted tendon. The end of the ruptured tendon will be stitched onto a button. A small bone tunnel is made where the tendon should attach. The tendon and button are then threaded through the tunnel. The button is flipped over to sit flush with your bone. This stops the tendon pulling away from the bone. Over time your body will heal the tunnel in the bone, and the repair then knits together with your scar tissue.



# After your injury

Physiotherapy will help you make a full recovery. Your physiotherapist will advise and help you to settle your pain and protect your elbow whilst it heals and guide you through your rehabilitation journey.

After surgery, the aim is to allow the bicep tendon to heal back onto the bone and so you will need to avoid any tension on the repair, at least initially.

It is important to manage your pain following your surgery. In the first few days following your surgery, ice packs can be a good way of helping to reduce the pain and swelling in your elbow. We would suggest using an ice pack on your elbow for about 15 minutes every 3 or 4 hours during the day. Do not put ice directly next to your skin as it may cause an ice burn. Wrap it in a damp tea towel or something similar. Remove the pack if irritation increases.

When resting, try to keep your elbow above the level of your heart, as it will help manage any swelling that you may have after your operation during the first few days.

If your elbow pain is not well controlled, we would recommend you seek advice from your physiotherapist or GP as this will help you make a full recovery.

Following your surgery, we recommend that you use a sling during the first two weeks to rest the injured tissues to allow them to heal correctly. This will also help with the pain and discomfort that you will be experiencing.

Depending upon how well you are progressing with rehabilitation and how well your pain is settling down will help the physiotherapist judge how long you should use your sling.



## How do I fit my sling?



1. Support your arm on a pillow before you start. Slide your sling underneath the arm, so that your elbow is tucked into the corner of the sling, as shown.



2. Now using the non-operated arm feed the strap around your back and over the non-operated shoulder, as shown.



3. Now pull the strap up on itself and fix the velcro at a level where the arm feels comfortable and supported, as shown.

# How can I sleep?

Sleeping can be a little uncomfortable if you try to lie on your injured elbow. We recommend that you lie on your opposite side. Ordinary pillows can be used to give yourself comfort and support (feather pillows are easier to use than foam ones).

**Wear your sling whilst sleeping and do not remove it at night-time.**



If sleeping on your side, having a pillow or two under your head usually gives enough support for most people. A pillow tucked along your back helps to prevent you rolling onto your operated elbow in the night. A pillow in front of your tummy is a good place to rest your hand to help you sleep.



If sleeping on your back, use a pillow under the elbow of your operated arm as shown. Again, important in helping you get a good night's rest.

## Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is very important if you are to make a full recovery following your injury. The physiotherapist will guide you on how to return to your normal work and activities and is vital if you are to make a fully recovery. We recommend that you avoid positions that your elbow will feel vulnerable in. Your physiotherapist will discuss and advice you on this and show you how to put this into practice during your rehabilitation.

## Exercises

**Try to do ten repetitions of each exercise.**

You should do your exercises in this order at least twice a day at home, until your follow-up physiotherapy appointment. They can then be altered or increased under the guidance of your physiotherapist.



Open and close your hand as gently as comfort allows.

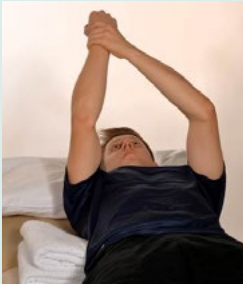


You can also rotate the wrist in a circle so it does not get too stiff.



Have your arm resting comfortably on a pillow.

Practice turning the hand so that the palm faces up and then down as shown in the picture.



From lying on your back with your elbows supported as before, use your unoperated arm to lift the other up towards your head. Try to get your hands on top of your head if you can.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=GkxahPUKb2Q>



<https://youtu.be/Kauh1iE7wLQ>

From lying on your back with your elbows supported as before, use your unoperated arm to lift the other arm up toward your forehead as shown above. From that position then use the unoperated arm to straighten your elbow upwards, as shown above, as your comfort allows. Do not force the elbow straight but gently encourage it to straighten, which should not be painful.

Your rehabilitation will progress until you have made a good recovery back to all of your normal activities, work and sports.

We are very keen to make sure that you recover as well as possible and will review your progress after rehabilitation at 6 months.

# When can I do my normal activities?

This depends upon your symptoms. Most people are comfortable by between 6 to 12 weeks following injury.

Driving can be resumed when you are comfortable and safe to control a car. It is wise to discuss this with your insurance company. We would advise you not to drive for at least four to six weeks after your operation.

## Guide:

- Light work (no lifting) 4-6 weeks
- Medium (light lifting below shoulder level) 6 weeks onwards
- Heavy (above shoulder level) 3-6 months

If you are at all worried about your shoulder you should contact the hospital's shoulder and elbow team. The telephone numbers are on the next page

## Contact numbers

**Kings Mill Hospital** – Telephone: 01623 622515

**Newark Hospital** – Telephone: 01636 681681

### Extension number

King's Mill physiotherapy department **3221** (Monday to Friday, 8am-5pm)

Newark Hospital physiotherapy department **5885** (Monday to Friday, 8am-5pm)

## **Further sources of information**

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)

Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

## **Patient Experience Team (PET)**

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222

**Newark Hospital:** 01636 685692

**Email:** [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net).

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