

Common Extensor Tendon (Elbow) Repair

Physical Therapy Protocol

Phase I – Protection & Early Motion (Weeks 0–2)

Goals:

- Protect the surgical repair.
- Reduce pain and inflammation.
- Maintain joint mobility of wrist, fingers, and elbow.

Precautions:

- **Wear a splint full-time** until the first post-op visit.
- **Sling for arm support** as needed for comfort.
- **Wrist brace required at all times** (except during therapy and hygiene) after the post-op splint is removed.
- **No lifting with the surgical extremity.**
- **No repetitive activity**

Clinical Care:

- **Swelling and wound management:** Monitor for excessive swelling, redness, heat, drainage, or worsening pain.
- **Ice and elevation** to control inflammation.
- **Pain control:** Follow prescribed post-op pain regimen.
-

Exercises:

- **Gentle ROM of fingers** while in the post-op splint.
- **Passive and active-assisted ROM** of hand, wrist, and elbow.
- **Focus on terminal elbow extension.**

Criteria to Advance:

- **Splint removal after the first post-op visit.**
- **Minimal pain with gentle ROM exercises.**

Phase II – Motion & Progressive Mobilization (Weeks 2–6)

Goals:

- Restore full pain-free elbow, wrist, and forearm ROM.
- Begin light functional use of the hand and arm.

Precautions:

- **Continue wrist brace for ADLs, but begin weaning as tolerated starting at 2 weeks.**
- **No resistance exercises for the surgical extremity.**
- **No repetitive activity.**

Clinical Care:

- **Protect repair while restoring ROM.**
- **Continue swelling management.**
- **Initiate light scar mobilization** once the wound is fully healed.

Exercises:

- **Full elbow ROM goal:** Flexion, extension, supination, and pronation by 4–6 weeks.
- **Maintain ROM of non-affected joints** (shoulder, fingers).
- **Begin shoulder isometrics.**
- **Progress to active-assisted ROM (AAROM).**
- **Light stretching can begin at 4 weeks**, emphasizing **end-range and passive overpressure** (low load/long duration).

Criteria to Advance:

- **At least 6 weeks of healing since surgery.**
- **Pain-free ROM to at least 120° flexion and 0° extension.**

- **Supination/pronation near symmetrical with the non-operative side.**

Phase III – Strengthening & Functional Progression (Weeks 6–12)

Goals:

- Initiate pain-free strengthening.
- Improve grip strength and endurance.
- Continue progression of ROM and functional use.

Precautions:

- **No lifting >5 lbs.**
- **Minimize repetitive activity to prevent irritation.**

Clinical Care:

- **Continue to phase out wrist brace as tolerated.**
- **Minimize inflammation and avoid pain-provoking activities.**
- **Use a counterforce elbow strap during exercise if pain persists.**

Exercises:

- **Begin light strengthening** with pain-free **isometrics** for the wrist and elbow.
- **Advance to resistance exercises and eccentric strengthening** as tolerated.
- **Strengthening progression:**
 - **Tube or light weights (≤ 1 lb)** for elbow flexion, extension, supination, and pronation starting at 8 weeks.
 - **Slowly increase resistance as symptoms allow.**
 - **Grip strengthening** using putty or a ball (must be pain-free).

Criteria to Advance:

- **At least 10 weeks of healing since surgery.**
- **Full pain-free ROM achieved.**
- **Improving strength without increased discomfort.**

Phase IV – Return to Full Activity (Weeks 12–16+)

Goals:

- Restore full functional use.
- Improve endurance and prevent re-injury.

Precautions:

- **Gradual return to heavier lifting.**
- **Limit repetitive high-load activities.**

Clinical Care:

- **Continue progressive strengthening and endurance training.**
- **Gradual return to full functional and sport-specific activities.**

Exercises:

- **Begin task-specific functional movements.**
- **Continue progressive strengthening for wrist, forearm, and shoulder as needed for work/sport.**

Return to Work/Sport:

- **At least 12 weeks of healing.**
- **Symptom-free task/sport-specific activity tolerated.**

Final Notes:

- **Progression should be guided by pain tolerance and functional milestones.**
- **Modify activity levels based on individual recovery rates.**
- **Contact the surgeon if pain, stiffness, or swelling persist beyond expected recovery time**