

Rehabilitation Guidelines | Elbow Arthroscopy (Keyhole Elbow Surgery)

What to expect during your recovery

Rehabilitation after elbow arthroscopy is a **progressive process** designed to restore movement, reduce pain, and gradually return you to normal function. Recovery is typically **faster than more complex elbow procedures**.

General guidelines

- Early movement is encouraged to **prevent stiffness**
- Swelling and pain should be managed with **regular ice around the elbow**
- **No sling** is required and can be counter-productive to recovery if motion is used
- If tolerated, regular **anti-inflammatory medication** should be taken for 3 weeks to reduce internal swelling and allow quickest recovery of movement
- Avoid heavy lifting or overloading the arm in the early stages

Weeks 0-4: Early recovery and movement

During the first phase, the focus is on reducing swelling and restoring movement.

- Ice elbow for the first week
- Compression bandage (Tubigrip) used for first 3 to 4 weeks
- Normal daily use including driving
 - These are encouraged as part of recovery to assist movement
 - Avoid heavy or highly repetitive activities
- NO SLING to be used

Exercises: (physiotherapist supervised)

- Elbow **extension** (straightening) and **flexion** (bending) to maximal extent tolerated
- **Forearm rotation** (pronation and supination)
- Gentle shoulder stretches in all directions
- Grip strengthening
- Lower body and cardio unrestricted as desired

Important:

- Exercises 3x/day
- Avoid activities that increase pain or swelling
- Wounds and recovery will be reviewed at 2 weeks and dressings removed

Weeks 4-12: Restoring movement and strength

At this time:

- Ensure full restoration of movement, or as close as the individual condition will allow
- Develop strength gradually and return to normal function as comfort and movement allow

Exercises:

- Resistance exercises for biceps, triceps, and forearm rotation
- Shoulder strengthening exercises
- Lower body work if desired

Important:

- Avoid heavy lifting or repetitive strain until comfortable
- Return to work and sport is possible in broad terms as recovery allows.
- Throwing or high intensity sport or gym, or very heavy physical work, should not be undertaken before 4 weeks, even if full movement is attained and the elbow is comfortable, to prevent flare-up of internal swelling setting recovery back.
- Report any block to movement progression or unexpected pain to Dr. Dallalana for investigation

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Weeks 6-12: Strengthening and functional recovery

Rehabilitation progresses to include:

- Restoration of full elbow movement
- Strengthening of the elbow, shoulder, and forearm
- Improved coordination and control

You may begin:

- Progressive strengthening exercises
- Cardiovascular activities such as cycling, walking, or elliptical training
- More advanced upper limb exercises

Weeks 12-26: Advanced strengthening and return to activity

At this stage:

- Strength and endurance continue to improve
- Functional and sport-specific activities are introduced

Rehabilitation may include:

- Progressive resistance training
- Advanced strengthening of the shoulder and forearm
- Plyometric or dynamic exercises (as appropriate)

Return to activity

- Light daily activities are resumed early
- Return to sport or higher-level activity is gradual
- Progression is guided by strength, movement, and absence of pain

Your rehabilitation journey

Recovery after elbow arthroscopy varies depending on the procedure performed and your individual response to rehabilitation. Following your physiotherapy program and progressing gradually is important to restore function and reduce the risk of ongoing symptoms.

Important note

These guidelines provide a general framework for recovery. Specific instructions may vary depending on your procedure and individual circumstances. Any instructions provided by Dr Richard Dallalana should be followed in preference to these guidelines.