

**Nirschl Orthopaedic Center &  
Virginia Sportsmedicine Institute  
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**POSTOPERATIVE ELBOW PROGRAM  
PHYSICAL THERAPY REHABILITATION**

**DAYS 1-7**

1. Expect a good bit of soreness.
2. Keep elbow in immobilizer the majority of the time for the first 48 hours.
3. Sleep on your back, if possible, with the arm up on a pillow either on your stomach or by your side.
4. Be sure to maintain full shoulder motion. Move your shoulder through the full range of motion several times each day.
5. Starting day 1 begin moving your fingers and wrist for 2 minutes, 3-5 times a day.
6. You may shower on the third day after surgery: remove bandages, gently work the elbow in the shower. After showering, gently air or blow dry the wound and apply antibiotic ointment. Cover the wound with Band-Aids or gauze.
7. Day 3-6 wear the immobilizer for protection, remove for shower and at times for limbering the elbow. Perform limbering exercises 4-6 times a day.
8. Ice several times a day for 10 - 20 minutes at a time if pain or swelling persists.

Medications: Use pain or anti-inflammatory medications as prescribed by your doctor. If you are taking no anti-inflammatory medicine you may take aspirin or Tylenol. **DO NOT TAKE ASPRIN AND ANTI-INFLAMMATORY MEDICINE SIMULTANEOUSLY.**

**EXPECT SIGNIFICANT DEEP ELBOW PAIN THROUGH THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS. THIS REFLECTS THE WORK DONE AND THE HEALING PROCESS!!!**

Your level of pain will also vary with the extent of elbow and wrist use. Stiffness and pain after use of the arm is normal, as well as increased discomfort and stiffness in the a.m.

**RECHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR IF:**

The wound looks "angry" - swelling, redness, excessive heat, oozing from the incision, or if pain dramatically increases.

If fever of 100 degrees or more persists for more than one day.

**DAYS 7-17**

1. Begin limbering elbow more aggressively with bending and straightening motions. Start in warm shower, but continue exercises outside of the shower as well.
2. By day 17 about 80% of elbow motion return is average. If not, check with your M.D. or therapist.
3. Continue working on moving the wrist, fingers, and forearm several times a day.
4. Use arm for light activities.
5. Use immobilizer occasionally for protection only. Leave immobilizer off the majority of the time.
6. Use counter-force brace for activities such as typing, light lifting or house work..

## **DAYS 18-21**

1. Use counter-force brace with exercising.
2. Begin squeezing the eggercizer, a nerf ball or sponge (Do not use a tennis or racquet ball)
3. Actively bend and straighten elbow through the fullest possible range.
4. Begin tennis elbow exercise protocol but start with only 5 repetitions and slowly progress as able.

The tennis elbow exercise program is designed to progressively strengthen but no overly stress the muscles involved. Mild muscular soreness and or fatigue following exercise is normal. Ice may be utilized to help control discomfort.

## **3 WEEKS**

1. Continue to progress the elbow exercise protocol, including adding light weights when you can do 3 sets of 10 repetitions (per protocol).
2. Use counter-force brace with comfortable tension for exercises.
3. Increase use of arm over 3-6 week period for normal activities.
4. Partial relief of pre-surgery pain is usually noted in the 3-6 week period.
5. Maintain as high a level of aerobic activity as you did preoperatively (walking, jogging etc.). Use the counter-force brace during strenuous activities. If you note increased pain you may have over stressed the arm:
6. Use ice as needed for 10-20 minutes to relieve pain.
7. Decrease your activity level, and progress more slowly.

On average your arm will perform normally for activities of daily living in 2 months and for competitive sports in 6 months. There may be occasions however, over the next year where you experience discomfort. Use ice, aspirin, acetaminophen or ibuprofen at these times. Contact your doctor if major pain lasts more than 5 days.

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- ❖ To reduce the risk of injury consult your healthcare professional before beginning any exercise program. This is general information and is not intended to diagnose or replace your current health care professional. The Nirschl Orthopaedic Center is not liable for any injury or pain you may experience as a result of this exercise program. As with any exercise program, if you begin to feel faint, dizzy, or have physical discomfort you should stop immediately and consult your health care professional.