

Distal Biceps Tendon Repair — Pre-Operative Patient Guide

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Biceps Tendon Tear at the Elbow

Your Condition & Procedure

The condition

The **biceps tendon** attaches the biceps muscle to the radius bone just below the elbow. A **distal biceps tendon tear** usually happens with a sudden heavy load on a bent elbow—often a pop, followed by bruising and a change in the shape of the muscle. Without repair, the arm loses slight strength in turning the palm up and bending the elbow.

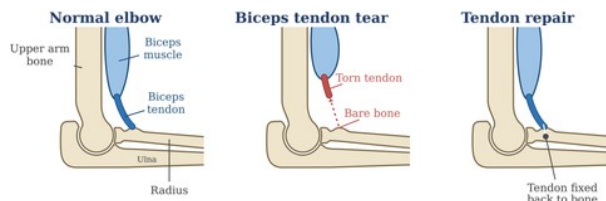
The surgery

Distal biceps repair is a typically outpatient surgery done through a small incision at the front of the elbow. The tendon is brought back down and reattached to the bone with strong sutures and a small implant. Older tears may need a cadaver tendon graft. The final plan is determined during surgery.

Risks & benefits

Benefits: Most patients regain near-normal strength for bending the elbow and turning the forearm.

Risks are uncommon and include infection, blood clots, numbness along the outer forearm (common, usually temporary), weakness straightening the wrist or fingers, re-tear of the tendon, extra bone that limits forearm rotation, injury to nearby structures (such as nerves, blood vessels, or cartilage), stiffness, persistent pain, and the need for further surgery. These will be reviewed with you in detail before surgery.



Distal biceps tendon tear and repair (illustration)

Before Surgery

- **Medications:** We will tell you what to stop and when (e.g., blood thinners, anti-inflammatories, some supplements, weight-loss injections).
- **Fasting:** Follow the instructions from your surgery coordinator/facility. In general, you should have nothing to eat or drink starting at midnight the night before surgery.
- **Nicotine:** Stop all nicotine products—they slow healing.
- **Equipment:** A splint is placed at surgery; a hinged brace follows.
- **Physical therapy:** Typically starts ~2 weeks after surgery.
- **Home:** Plan for a helper and one-handed tasks at first.
- **Medical history:** Let us know if you or anyone in your family has a history of blood clot disorders or a malignant hyperthermia reaction to anesthesia.
- **Health:** Call us if you develop a fever, illness, or skin problem near the elbow.

Day of Surgery

- If instructed, take blood pressure/heart medications with a small sip of water.
- Arrive at the time given by your surgery coordinator.
- Bring your medication list, insurance card, and photo ID.
- Wear loose clothing; leave jewelry and valuables at home.
- A responsible adult must drive you home. You may **not** drive yourself.

Immediately After Surgery

- You will recover in the recovery area; most patients go home the same day.
- Your surgeon will discuss the procedure with you and your support person.
- Your care team will review wound care, restrictions, medications, follow-up, and warning signs before discharge.

Milestone	What to Expect After Surgery (General Timeline)
Splint & brace	A splint for 2 weeks, then a hinged elbow brace that is opened a little more each week. Full elbow motion is expected by 6–7 weeks, and the brace then comes off.
Daily life	Desk work often within 1–2 weeks. No lifting or weight on the surgical arm for 6 weeks. No driving while taking narcotic pain medication.
Lifting	Light strengthening from 6 weeks, with a 10 lb limit until 12 weeks. Unrestricted lifting at 3 months; heavy and explosive lifting come last.
Work & sports	Heavy or manual work typically at 3–4 months and sports at 6 months. Older tears or graft repairs take ~6 weeks longer.
► Please note: This is a general guide only. Detailed post-operative instructions will be provided on the day of surgery, and your restrictions and timeline may change based on the findings and procedures performed.	

Learn More

We **strongly recommend** reading these pages from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (OrthoInfo) before your surgery:

- **Your condition and procedure:** **Biceps Tendon Tear at the Elbow** — <https://orthoinfo.org/en/diseases--conditions/biceps-tendon-tear-at-the-elbow/>

Video: You may find a video demonstrating an example (not the exact technique) of your surgery at

<https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/activity/1763054-biceps-tendon-tears-at-the-elbow> (or browse <https://patient.orthopedica.com/student/catalog>).

Questions before surgery? Call our office at (972) 378-1438. For a medical emergency, call 911.