

Post-operative rehabilitation protocol

Triceps tendon repair

Reattachment of the triceps tendon to the point of the elbow. For patients, physiotherapists, and GPs.

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The plan at a glance

The tendon is pulled every time the elbow bends deeply or pushes. Bending is regained in stages over six weeks. Pushing waits twelve.

	Phase 1 Weeks 0 to 2	Phase 2 Weeks 2 to 6	Phase 3 Weeks 6 to 12	Phase 4 After 12 weeks
Brace	Backslab with the elbow fairly straight. Sling	Hinged brace, full time	None	None
Movement	Hand, wrist, and shoulder	Elbow bend increased in stages. Full bend by week 6	Full active range	Full range
Load	A cup of tea	A cup of tea. No pushing	Up to 2 kg. No pushing	Progressive triceps strengthening
Review	Wound check and brace fitted at 2 weeks	Clinic at 6 weeks	Clinic at 12 weeks	Discharge when strong

Darker shading means tighter restriction. Times are guides. Your surgeon's instructions take precedence where they differ.

Seek advice urgently if

- The wound becomes red, hot, or swollen, or it leaks or opens.
- You have a fever or feel unwell.
- You feel a pop at the back of the elbow and cannot straighten it against gravity.
- New numbness or tingling develops in the little and ring fingers.
- The elbow swells rapidly and feels tight.
- The hand becomes cold, pale, or blue.

Call 999 or go to the Emergency Department for shortness of breath or chest pain.

For anything else on this list, contact your surgical team the same day. Out of hours, call NHS 111.

Phase 1

Protect: weeks 0 to 2

Aims: control swelling, protect the repair and the wound.

Do

- Keep the backslab on and dry. It holds the elbow fairly straight.
- Wear the sling when up and about.
- Move the fingers and wrist fully, every hour.
- Lift the whole arm at the shoulder several times a day.
- Keep the hand raised on pillows when resting.
- Take pain relief regularly as prescribed.

Avoid

- Bending the elbow inside the splint.
- Pushing with the hand: chair arms, doors, getting out of bed.
- Leaning on the elbow.
- Lifting anything heavier than a cup of tea.
- Driving.

Expected in this phase

The back of the elbow bruises and swells. The wound sits over the point of the elbow, where the skin is thin. Keep pressure off it.

Phase 2

Bend in stages: weeks 2 to 6

Aims: regain bending gradually, keep straightening passive.

Do

- Wear the hinged brace at all times. Your therapist sets the limit of bend.
- Bend the elbow under its own power up to the brace limit.
- Let the elbow straighten with gravity or with the other hand. Do not push it straight.
- Expect the limit to increase each week, to a full bend by week six.
- Turn the palm up and down with the elbow supported.
- Massage the scar once the wound has fully healed.

Avoid

- Straightening the elbow against resistance or gravity overhead.
- Pushing up from a chair or bed.
- Lifting anything heavier than a cup of tea.
- Crutches or a walking frame on that side.
- Leaning on the elbow.

Move on to Phase 3 when

Six weeks have passed and the elbow bends fully in the brace.

Phase 3

Active movement: weeks 6 to 12

Aims: full active movement, normal light use.

Do

- Stop using the brace.
- Straighten the elbow under its own power, including overhead.
- Regain the last few degrees of bend and straightening.
- Start static (isometric) triceps exercises from week eight.
- Strengthen the shoulder and grip.
- Use the arm for light daily tasks.

Avoid

- Pushing: doors, chair arms, press-ups.
- Lifting more than 2 kg.
- Resisted triceps exercise.
- Any activity with a risk of falling.

Move on to Phase 4 when

Twelve weeks have passed and you can straighten the elbow fully overhead without pain.

Phase 4

Strengthen and return: after 12 weeks

Aims: triceps strength, staged return to pushing, work, and sport.

- Start resisted triceps work with bands, then light weights.
- Introduce pushing in stages: wall press, incline press, then floor press-ups from four to five months.
- Return to heavy manual work and contact sport from five to six months.

What to expect

Triceps strength recovers slowly and reaches its best at about a year. A few degrees short of fully straight is common and rarely matters.

Return to activity

Typical times from surgery. Each depends on comfort, movement, and healing.

Activity	From	Condition
Desk work	1 to 2 weeks	One-handed, in the brace
Driving	6 to 8 weeks	Out of the brace, able to control the wheel
Running	6 to 8 weeks	Out of the brace
Swimming	8 to 10 weeks	Gentle breaststroke
Light manual work	12 weeks	No pushing loads
Light gym resistance	12 weeks	Triceps loaded gradually
Golf	4 months	Putting and chipping first
Press-ups, bench press, dips	4 to 5 months	Staged return
Heavy manual work	5 to 6 months	Good triceps strength
Contact sport	6 months	Full strength

When to slow the protocol

Some patients need more time. Your surgeon will tell you if any of these apply.

- **Late repair, or reconstruction with a tendon graft.** Each phase runs two to four weeks later.
- **Wound over the point of the elbow slow to heal.** Bending is held back until the wound is sound.
- **Kidney disease, steroid treatment, or anabolic steroid use.** Tendon healing is slower and re-rupture is more likely.
- **Leg injury needing crutches or a frame.** Weight through the operated arm is not allowed for twelve weeks.
- **Smoking and diabetes.** Both slow healing. Stop smoking and vaping nicotine. Keep blood sugar well controlled.

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This protocol is general guidance for uncomplicated primary repair of a triceps tendon rupture. It is not a substitute for individual medical advice. Instructions from your own surgeon and therapist take precedence.

Version 1.0, October 2026. Review due October 2028.