

Distal Biceps Tendon Repair



When is it Time to Think About Surgery?

Distal biceps tendon rupture results in significant elbow flexion and forearm supination weakness. Surgical repair of distal biceps tendon injuries is recommended for most patients.

About the Surgery

This surgery involves re-attaching the biceps tendon to the radial tuberosity just past the elbow. There are several techniques used depending on surgeon preference. Some surgeons make one incision on the front of the elbow, and others make an incision on the front and back. The tendon can be repaired through bone tunnels, with suture anchors, or a cortical button. You are in a splint for two weeks to rest the elbow after the surgery.

Preparing for Surgery

You are encouraged to stop smoking before surgery to prevent lung complications or delayed healing. Pre-admission testing (lab work, EKG, chest x-ray) will be scheduled prior to your surgery. Medications such as anti-inflammatory medications, aspirin, and blood thinning medications should be stopped one week before surgery unless otherwise specified by your family doctor.

What to Expect After Surgery

You will be in a splint at the wrist to rest the involved tendon for about two weeks after surgery, at which time you can begin active range of motion. Strengthening begins at six weeks post-surgery.

Complications and Risks of Surgery

Risks of surgery include pain, bleeding, infection, damage to surrounding structures, stiffness, loss of function, failure of the tendon to heal, or blood clots in the arm that can go to the lung (pulmonary embolus). Anesthetic risks include heart attack, stroke, blindness, and death.

Recovery

Strengthening begins six weeks after surgery. You will be allowed to ease into activities as your strength allows. The tendon is generally healed by 12 weeks and unrestricted activity, again based on strength and progress in recovery, is permitted.

Return to Work

Return to work is highly individualized. Jobs requiring only deskwork may be able to return within 1-2 weeks, whereas heavy lifting manual labor jobs may require 3 months or longer to return without restrictions.