

Burke and Bradley  
Orthopedics-UPMC

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**PHYSICAL THERAPY  
INSTRUCTIONS FOR  
DISTAL BICEPS TENDON  
REPAIR OR REATTACHMENT**

**PHASE I: 0-4 WEEKS POST-OP**

**Initial Post-operative Immobilization:**

- The patient is maintained in a posterior arm splint with elbow immobilization at 90 degrees until the first post-op visit (2 weeks after surgery).

**Hinged Elbow Brace:**

- An unlocked hinged elbow brace set at 30 degrees of extension and 110 degrees of flexion is applied during the first post-op visit. This brace will be worn for the next six weeks.

**Clinical Goals:**

- Maintain minimal swelling and soft tissue healing
- Elbow ROM from 30 degrees of extension to 110 degrees of flexion
- Achieve full forearm supination and pronation

**Exercises Week 3-4:**

- **Passive** ROM for elbow flexion and supination (with elbow at 90 degrees)
- **Assisted** ROM for elbow extension and pronation (with elbow at 90 degrees)
- Shoulder ROM as needed based on evaluation avoiding excessive extension
- Ice after exercise

**PHASE II: 5-8 WEEKS POST-OP**

**Clinical Goals:**

- Full elbow and forearm ROM by 8 weeks

**Testing:**

- Bilateral elbow and forearm ROM
- Grip strength at 6-8 weeks

#### **Exercises Week 5:**

- **Active** extension limit changed to 20 degrees. **Passive** flexion may be increased to full flexion as tolerated. The brace stays on at all times except when bathing or exercising.
- **Active** wrist flexion/extension
- **Active** ROM of hand in neutral position
- Supination/pronation through pain-free range

#### **Exercises Week 6:**

- **Active** extension limit changed to 10 degrees
- Continue same exercises
- Putty may be used to 3 times per day to improve grip strength
- Ladder with arm supported by unaffected extremity
- Gentle pulley while limiting elbow extension to -10 degrees

#### **Exercises Week 7:**

- Full **active** extension is permitted
- Supine scapula stabilization with **no weight**
- Biceps specific exercises

#### **Exercises Week 8:**

- At the end of 8 weeks and **after evaluation by the physician** the brace may be discontinued
- **Passive** elbow extension exercises may be started if needed
- Light strengthening exercises are started with light tubing or 1-kg weights for elbow flexion, extension, forearm rotation and wrist flexion and extension
- Shoulder TheraBand strengthening exercises are started
- Supine scapula stabilization with 1-kg weight
- Continue biceps specific exercises
- Ice after strengthening exercises

### **PHASE III: 9 WEEKS TO 6 MONTHS POST-OP**

#### **Clinical Goals:**

- The strengthening program is gradually increased so that the patient is using full weights by 3 months. It may take as long as 6 months before a patient returns to heavy work.

#### **Testing:**

- Grip strength
- Elbow ROM

#### **Exercises:**

- Elbow ROM exercises if ROM is limited
- Strengthening exercises to the wrist, forearm and possibly shoulder, depending on sport and/or work requirements