

Rehabilitation after Elbow Release Surgery

The goal of elbow release surgery is to restore motion and function to a stiff and painful elbow. During the operation, we will attempt to optimize your elbow's motion by balancing the soft tissues around your joint and freeing-up any adhesions and contractures. The smoothness of your joint may have also been improved by removal of loose bodies and other abnormalities.

Following surgery, the responsibility is yours to maintain the motion that was achieved with a simple, but vitally important series of exercises. Our highest priority is maintaining your elbow motion. We use a motion machine (CPM) immediately after surgery to move the arm gently through an arc of motion. Splints are used to stretch the tissues without causing pain.

This rehabilitation program focuses on elbow flexion (bending) and extension (straightening). Some patients will also focus on forearm pronation and supination (rotating your palm up and down). It is essential that the program below be performed as written. If not, your elbow will become stiff again very quickly. Maintaining the range of motion gained at surgery is essential to restoring your arm function. Strengthening exercises are avoided until you have achieved full elbow motion and comfort.

Elbow disability cannot be reversed without persistent work on range of motion, strength, and coordination. Maximum benefit following elbow release surgery is usually achieved by 6 months after surgery. A strong commitment to your exercise program and rehabilitation is the most important factor in ensuring you achieve this goal.

Rehabilitation Instructions after Elbow Release Surgery

1. **CPM Machine:** This is the motion machine that is used immediately after surgery and overnight in the hospital. A similar machine will be delivered and set-up in your home for use after discharge from the hospital. Usually, the CPM is used for one month after surgery.
 - **Use CPM two times a day. Once in the morning and once in the evening, for 30-45 minutes each time.**
 - Slowly increase the machine to maximum flexion and extension. You do not have to go fast.
 - You should not use the CPM more than this unless you discuss it with us. Performing exercises on your own, as learned in therapy, are very important and should be done as often as possible.

2. **JAS Splints (Static Progressive splints):** These are the splints that you use to slowly stretch your elbow into full extension and flexion. You will need to be fitted and instructed in the use of these splints prior to your operation. Usually, these splints are used for 3 to 4 months after surgery.
 - **Use JAS splint for extension each morning for 30 minutes and 30 minutes every evening beginning the day after surgery**
 - Slowly increase the brace every 5 minutes. This should not be done too fast. It should not hurt – we simply want to stretch the elbow.

3. **Weighted Stretches:** You will learn this exercise in therapy before you go home from the hospital. Use a 2-pound cuff weight on your wrist.
 - **Perform weighted stretch exercise two times a day (morning and evening) for 10-15 minutes each time.**
 - Relax and let the weight stretch your elbow straight (extended)

4. **Therapy:** Outpatient occupational/physical therapy should be started the Monday after surgery. You will need to arranged/scheduled before your surgery. You will need to attend regular appointments for 3 to 5 months after surgery in order to maintain your elbow motion, monitor your progress, and prevent swelling and stiffness.
 - Therapy will be attended 3-5 times a week for the first few weeks. Depending on your progress, visits may then decrease up to 2 times a week until discharge.
 - Therapy will focus on motion, not strength. Typically, strengthening exercises are not allowed until 3-4 months after surgery.

5. **Home Exercises:** You will learn elbow exercises in therapy. These involve both ACTIVE (using your own arm muscles to move the elbow) and PASSIVE (using your unaffected arm to move the elbow) exercises.
 - **Perform home exercises at least two times a day. You should do these as often as possible throughout the day. More is better.**
 - Use and Ace wrap or compressive sleeve at all times to prevent swelling. Your therapist should provide you with this at your first visit.

6. **Medications:** You will be provided with medicine prescriptions when you leave the hospital. Pain medication and Indocin are typically prescribed.
 - Indocin (Indomethacin) is used to prevent bone formation about the elbow and limit inflammation. It should be taken twice a day with food and Pepcid for 2 weeks. If you have any side effects or concerns about the Indocin, please contact our office before you stop taking it.
 - Pain medicines are used so that you can be diligent in your rehabilitation program. Pain about your elbow should not stop you from performing any of this program. If you have problems, or do not feel your pain is well controlled, you should call our office right away.