

## **Physical Therapy Protocol: MEDIAL / LATERAL ELBOW TENDON REPAIR**

### **RESTRICTIONS:**

- NO active wrist flexion or extension for 6 weeks
- NO upper body weighted exercises for 3 months

## **Phase I: Protection and Early Motion (Weeks 0–6)**

### **Primary Goals**

- Protect the surgical repair and minimize stress on the tendon
  - Control pain and edema
  - Prevent stiffness in adjacent joints
  - Begin gentle, controlled wrist and elbow motion
- 

### **Precautions**

- **Posterior long-arm splint** for 1 week
  - **Wrist brace** x 5 additional weeks
  - **No active wrist flexion or extension**
  - **No lifting or resistance through the operative arm**
  - **Avoid combined elbow extension with wrist flexion/extension** (tension on repair)
- 

### **Interventions**

#### **Pain and Swelling Management**

- Cryotherapy 15–20 min several times daily x 2 weeks
- Compression sleeve and edema glove if indicated
- Elevation of arm above level of heart whenever feasible

#### **Passive and Assisted Motion (1–2 weeks)**

- Begin **PROM** wrist flexion/extension, ulnar/radial deviation
- Gentle forearm pronation/supination with elbow at 90° flexion (to protect repair)
- Shoulder, elbow, and finger AROM as tolerated

#### **Scapular and Shoulder Mobility**

- Gentle scapular retraction/depression drills

- Shoulder AROM (avoid extension beyond neutral)

### Criteria to Progress to Phase II

- Pain  $\leq$ 3/10 at rest
  - PROM of wrist and elbow symmetric to contralateral extremity
- 

## Phase II: Active Motion and Early Strengthening (Weeks 6–12)

### Primary Goals

- Restore active range of motion (AROM)
  - Discontinue wrist brace
  - Initiate gentle strengthening of elbow flexors and supinators
  - Maintain shoulder and scapular strength
- 

### Precautions

- Avoid resisted flexion or supination x12 weeks
  - Avoid upper body weighted exercises x12 weeks
- 

### Interventions:

- **ROM:**
  - Progress to full active elbow and wrist ROM as tolerated
  - Gentle stretching of forearm flexors or extensors (avoid pain)
- **Neuromuscular Re-education:**
  - Submaximal isometrics for wrist extensors (lateral) or flexors (medial)
  - Emphasize pain-free contractions only
- **Scapular and Shoulder Strengthening:**
  - Focus on periscapular control and postural endurance
  - Shoulder rotator cuff strengthening (as tolerated)
- **Manual Therapy:**
  - Gentle soft tissue mobilization around incision
  - Joint mobilizations to maintain full elbow and wrist mobility

### Criteria to Advance:

- Full, pain-free ROM of elbow and wrist
- No pain or swelling with light strengthening

- Good tolerance to submaximal loading of repaired tendon
- 

## **Phase III: Strengthening and Functional Return (Weeks 12–24+)**

### **Goals:**

- Restore strength and endurance of forearm musculature
- Gradually return to sport, work, or manual tasks
- Prevent recurrence with proper biomechanics

### **Precautions:**

- Avoid sudden eccentric loading until strength is symmetrical and pain-free
- No high-velocity or repetitive gripping until >14-16 weeks post-op

### **Interventions:**

- **Strengthening Progression:**
  - Begin isotonic wrist extension/flexion with light resistance
  - Add pronation/supination strengthening
  - Progress to eccentric wrist control exercises
  - Use putty, hand grippers, or theraband for functional resistance
- **Functional Training:**
  - Sport or work simulation drills (grip, carry, lift tasks)
  - Plyometric or higher-velocity activities after 14-16 weeks if tolerated
- **Stretching:**
  - Maintain flexibility of wrist flexors/extensors
- **Ergonomic and Technique Training:**
  - Evaluate and correct sport or work mechanics to prevent recurrence

### **Criteria for Return to Activity:**

- Full, pain-free ROM and strength ( $\geq 90\%$  of contralateral side)
- No tenderness at epicondyle or pain with resisted testing
- Surgeon clearance for unrestricted activity

**Expect Strength and endurance recovery to 80–90% of the contralateral limb by ~6 months. Strength will improve up to 1 year.**

**No formal weight or work restrictions after 6 months.**