

Total Elbow Replacement

Hand Therapy Patient Information

What is a Total Elbow Replacement?

A total elbow replacement is an operation to remove the ends of the two bones that make up the elbow joint with an artificial joint. The muscles are kept in their normal position and continue to work in the normal way. The most common reason for having this operation is arthritis.

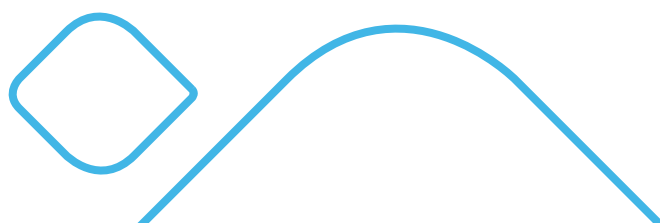
Post-operation Management

The dressings and/or cast applied after your surgery are normally removed around 10-14 days after the operation. If you were given a sling, you can wear this for comfort over the first two weeks but you **do not** need to wear this full-time.

- You **must not** use your hand for anything other than the exercises shown in this leaflet.
- You **must not** bear any weight on this arm for **eight weeks**.
- You **should not** exercise into pain. (Discomfort that settles after exercise is normal).
- You will be taught the exercises in this leaflet to help regain movement and strength.

Rehabilitation (Weeks 0-4)

- You **must not** lift or move any weight at this stage.
- Keep your arm **elevated** to help reduce swelling.
- When your arm is elevated, open and close your hand 10 times to help reduce the swelling.
- Your therapist may show you sweeping massage to help reduce the swelling.
- Once your stitches have dissolved or been removed (around 10-14 days post-operation), your therapist will teach you scar massage. This is done by applying firm pressure to the scar and moving in small circles. It is important that you do this regularly throughout the day to **prevent adhesions**. (Adhesions are when the scar becomes stuck or immobile).

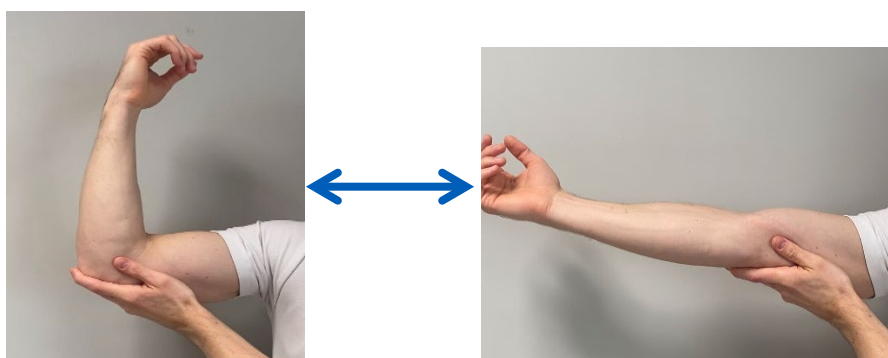




Exercises

- These exercises are designed to improve the movement in your hand and elbow.
- They should be done gently and without force.
- **Aim to complete these exercises every 1-2 hours.**
- **Once your wound has healed**, you may wish to practise these exercises whilst submerged in warm water. Your therapist can discuss this with you.

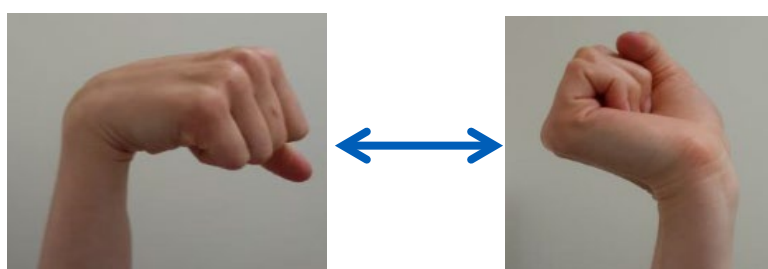
1. Bend your elbow as far as you can. Then relax your arm and allow gravity to help straighten/stretch your arm out straight. You may wish to support the upper arm, as shown below. Repeat this **10-20 times**.



2. Tuck your operated elbow into your side and at a right angle. Slowly turn your hand over so that your palm is facing the floor, then turn it up to face the ceiling. Do this **10-20 times**. If you are struggling, you may use your other hand to gently help, without causing pain.



3. With your fingers relaxed into a fist, bend your wrist forwards and backwards **10 times**.



- Support the upper arm with your other hand or the arm of a chair. Relax your arm and allow gravity to stretch your arm out straight. **Hold for 3-5 minutes.**



This exercise could be done with somebody else, either by helping to support underneath the elbow and pushing down on the wrist (A) or with your elbow resting on a worktop/table/armchair and the other person supporting your shoulder with one hand and pulling the forearm with the other hand (B).

A



B



Your therapist may decide to give you a splint to wear, which can help to straighten the elbow. If this is the case, please apply this at night time. It can also be worn for 30-60 minute periods during the day. Your therapist will discuss this with you. **If you have any concerns, please contact the Therapies Department on 01225 821241.**

Rehabilitation (Weeks 4-8)

- You can perform **light activities of daily living** (e.g. washing and dressing yourself).
- **Remember**, mild discomfort during exercise that settles in 30 minutes is normal.

Exercises

Continue the exercises and scar massage from 0-4 weeks.

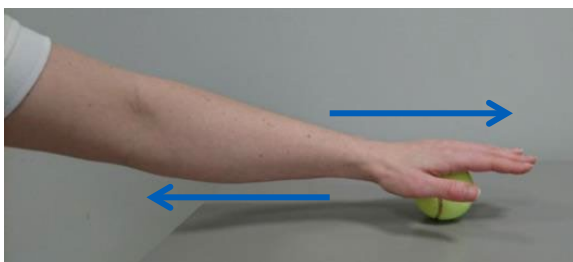
1. Place your wrist against the edge of a worktop or table. Straighten your elbow as far as you can. Then, use your other hand to push the elbow straighter. Hold the stretch for 3-5 minutes. This may be uncomfortable but not painful, so you can tolerate it.



2. Bend your elbow as far as you can. Then use your other hand to hold your forearm and bend the elbow further, holding the **stretch for 3-5 minutes**. This may be uncomfortable but should not be painful, so you can tolerate it.



3. Using a tennis ball, roll it on a table, forwards and backwards or side to side. Place the ball on a book or tray and roll from side to side in a controlled way as shown below. Complete each activity for 1 minute.



Rehabilitation (Weeks 8-10)

- Continue all of your previous exercises and scar massage.
- This week you will be starting some **strengthening exercises**.
- If you are still struggling to gain full active movement in your elbow at this stage, you can focus on the previous week's exercises. Once you have good range of movement in your elbow then you can start the strengthening exercises. Your therapist will guide you on this.
- You can now consider going back to **driving**. Discuss this with your therapist.

Exercises

1. With your elbow tucked into your side, place your other hand on top of your forearm. Keeping your operated arm still, bend the elbow, pushing up against your non-operated hand and **hold for 5-10 seconds**. Repeat 5-10 times, completing this 4-6 times daily.



2. With your operated elbow tucked into your side and your palm facing upwards, place your other hand under your forearm. Keeping your operated arm still, push down against your non-operated hand and **hold for 5-10 seconds**. Repeat 5-10 times, completing this 4-6 times daily.



Rehabilitation (Weeks 10-12)

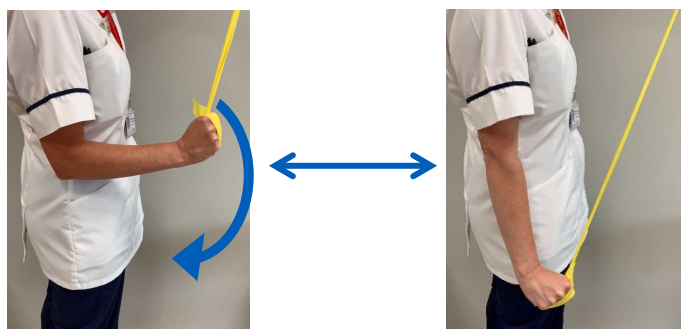
- Your arm is getting stronger
- You can now progress your strengthening exercises.
- You should complete these exercises 2-3 times daily.
- Your therapist will provide you with therapy band.

Exercises

1. Sit or stand with your operated arm by your side. Place the therapy band under your foot, and hold the other end in your operated hand. Bend your elbow so your hand is at shoulder height, hold for a few seconds, and slowly return to the start position. Repeat 5-10 times.

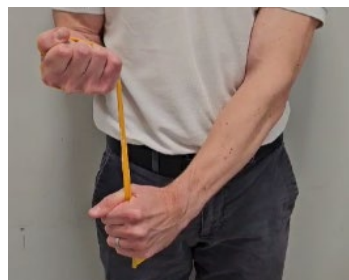
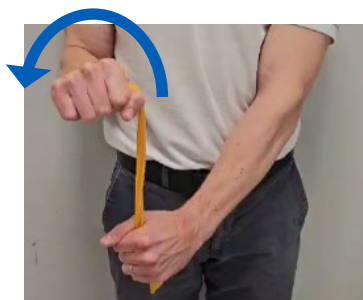


2. Attach the resistance band to a stable object above head height (e.g. banister, door hook). Hold on to the other end of the therapy band. Starting with your elbow in a bent position, pull down on the band to straighten your elbow. Repeat 5-10 times.

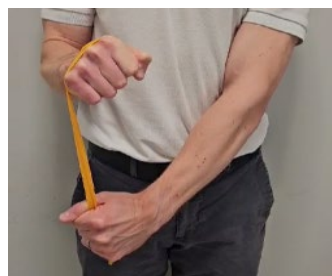
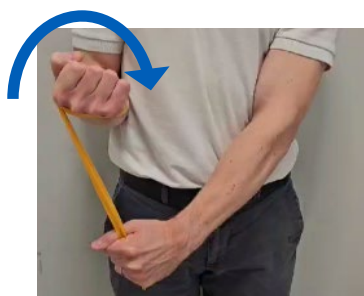


TOTAL ELBOW REPLACEMENT

- Sit or stand with your elbows tucked in at your side. Hold the therapy band in both hands, as shown below. With your unaffected arm, pull the band downwards and hold it still. Then turn your affected arm palm up to the ceiling and hold for 2-3 seconds.



- Sit or stand with your elbows tucked in at your side. Hold the therapy band in both hands, as shown below. With your unaffected arm, pull the band downwards and hold it still. Then turn your affected arm so the palm is facing down to the floor and hold for 2-3 seconds.

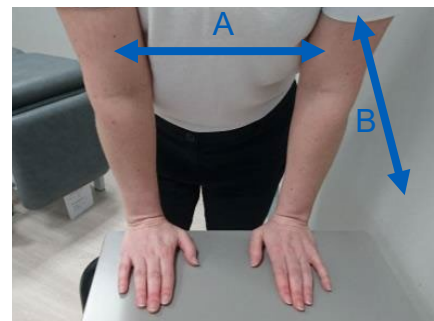


Rehabilitation (Weeks 12+)

- You can start putting your body weight through the elbow.
- You can go back to all daily activities.
- Discuss return to sport & heavy manual work with your therapist.

Exercises

- Stand up and place both your hands comfortably on to a table with your elbows straight.
 - Gently lean forwards and backwards putting weight on both arms. Hold each movement for 2-3 seconds and repeat 5-10 times.
 - Then, lean forwards putting weight on both arms and begin moving your shoulders to the right and left. Hold each movement for 2-3 seconds and repeat 5-10 times.



These exercises can be progressed to press ups against a wall or table. Your therapist can advise on how to do this.

General rehab tips for your hand, wrist and elbow

- **Warm water exercises** - Ensure all wounds have healed or dried up. Submerge the affected hand/arm in warm water for up to 5 mins and practise the exercises taught by your therapist.
- **Massage** - Rub into the affected area for 3-5 mins, approximately 4 times per day. You can use moisturising cream. Massage will help decrease swelling, improve movement, soften scars and de-sensitise the area affected. (Ensure all open wounds have healed and scabbed over, particularly if using moisturising cream).
- **Gently strengthening** - grip soft rolled socks/sponge
 - squeezing therapy putty
 - rice grasping.

If you have any problems, please contact your therapist. Contact details are below.

Hand Therapy

Brownsword Therapies Centre (Dept F1)
Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath, BA1 3NG
01225 821241 | www.ruh.nhs.uk

Please contact the Patient Support and Complaints Team (PSCT) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feed back your experience of the hospital.

Email ruh-tr.psct@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.