General Elbow Care:

Tips to keep your elbow in the best condition and out of the Surgeons office!

(this can apply to those who have had surgery and those who have not and want to avoid ever needing it!)

- Incorporate strength training, range of motion/flexibility and cardio workouts into your workout routine. To keep yourself in the best shape possible and to maintain a healthy elbow, try to vary the types of workouts you do each day. Performing the same routine each day can lead to overuse injuries. Furthermore, if weightlifting is irritating your elbow, try to lift with your palms up rather than down to decrease stress on the outside of the elbow.

- Be mindful of your daily activities (work, recreational, etc.). Some of us, especially now that many are working from home, spend a lot of time performing repetitive activities, especially those involving the computer, video games, etc. It is important to take breaks and stretch out your wrist, hand fingers and elbow throughout the day.

- Proper ergonomics are crucial to avoid overuse injuries of the elbow. An adjustable desk that can convert from standing to sitting will help take stress off the elbow as you work throughout the day. Similarly, a foam wrist cushion can help place the hand and wrist into a less stressful position to mitigate the risk of sustaining an overuse injury such as epicondylitis (tennis elbow). If you frequently use a computer mouse, a mouse with a trackball can sometimes help protect your elbow.

- For those athletes among us, be sure to maintain flexibility at the shoulder, neck, trunk, and hips and core to decrease stress on the elbow during athletic activities.

- Weak hips and/or legs may contribute to elbow injuries in the overhead athlete because of altered biomechanics and compensations.
Home Exercise Program: To keep your elbow healthy and allowing you to stay active:

Below is a list of the best exercises, that can be done 1-2 times per week (or as needed), as an addition to any exercise routine, to keep you elbow strong and pain-free.

- Wrist flexion and extension stretch – with the elbow extended, palm facing down and the shoulder at 90 degrees of elevation, extend your wrist as far as you can. Then use your opposite hand to extend the wrist even further. You should feel a stretch in your forearm. Once completed, flex your wrist. Use the opposite hand to stretch the wrist into flexion. Again, you will feel a stretch in your forearm.

Flexor stretch:  Extensor stretch:

- Gripping exercises are excellent to help the elbow. This can be done with a ball, a handheld gripper, or any other device that provides resistance while you attempt to make a fist. This will help strengthen the muscles of the forearm and will keep the elbow health. Be careful not to do this exercise if you are experiencing tennis elbow.
• Forearm rotation exercises – with a 1- or 2-pound weight held in your hand (or more if needed), elbow bent, simply turn your palm up and down, keeping the shoulder and elbow immobile. Perform this exercise with your elbow flexed to create forearm supination/pronation. This should be done in a very controlled manner to avoid any excess stress on the elbow. This can be done for 3 sets of 10.

  ![image of forearm rotation exercise]

• Wrist curls (flexion)- using a small hand weight in your hand, straighten your elbow, rest your forearm on the edge of the table or arm rest, palm up. Start with your wrist extended (palm should be facing away from you now), then curl the weight up (palm facing you). Perform in a controlled manner and perform 3 sets of 10.

  ![image of wrist curl (flexion)]

  **Start:**  ![image of start position]  **Finish:**  ![image of finish position]

• Wrist curl (extension)- using a small hand weight in your hand, straighten your elbow, rest your forearm on the edge of the table or arm rest, palm down. Start with wrist flexed (fingers down), then curl the weight up (back of your hand should be facing you). Perform in a controlled manner and perform 3 sets of 10.

  ![image of wrist curl (extension)]
If you have had elbow surgery:

After an elbow surgery, most patients have reached their maximum improvement when they are one year out from their surgery. Many have questions about what they can do and what they should avoid for the long term, to keep their elbow healthy.

1) What activities/sports are allowed after an elbow replacement?
   a. General activities of daily living such as cooking, cleaning, etc. can be performed after an elbow replacement
   b. Craft activities such as knitting and crocheting
   c. Board games, cards, etc.

2) What activities and sports are best avoided after an elbow replacement?
   a. Racket sports or throwing activities should be avoided after an elbow replacement
   b. Contact sports should be avoided after an elbow replacement
   c. Sports with a major risk of falling (horseback riding, climbing, etc.) should be avoided after an elbow replacement

3) Is there a weight limit on what I can do for the long term after a replacement?
   a. Generally you should avoid lifting objects more than 15lbs.
4) What about after Tommy John Surgery, what sports/activities are allowed?

a. Once you have completely recovered from Tommy John surgery, there are no restrictions placed on your elbow. You can perform all activities of daily living and compete in all sports.

5) What activities are best avoided?

a. There are no activities that need to be avoided after the person has completed rehabilitation from Tommy John surgery (which can take 12 to 15 months for a full recovery and return to full pitching/throwing activities). Activities that stress the surgery include throwing a baseball, throwing a javelin, and weightbearing activities on the elbow such as gymnastics.

b. Is there a weight limit? – no, there is no weight limit for lifting set on the elbow after full recovery from Tommy John surgery.

6) What are some tips to keeping my elbow healthy and pain-free?

a. Following elbow surgery, it is important to maintain your elbow motion as best as possible. Take a few minutes each day to completely bend and straighten your elbow to avoid any loss of motion.

b. After elbow surgery your elbow may flare up on you from time to time. This is normal. When this happens, ice the elbow and take some anti-inflammatory medications if you can tolerate these and do not have any contraindication to taking them.

7) When to be worried:

a. If you have had prior surgery on your elbow such as a tendon or ligament repair and feel a “pop” while preforming a strenuous activity, or numbness into your hand, please contact your doctor immediately.

b. If the elbow begins to swell up, especially if this swelling is accompanied by a significant increase in pain, fevers, chills, or night sweats, contact your doctor immediately.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to those surgeons and physical therapists who assisted with the creation of this content.

Julie Bishop, MD
Peter Chalmers, MD
Greg Cvetanovich, MD
Brandon Erickson, MD
Haim Hechtman, DPT
Holly Kreisle, DPT
Jonas J.R. Rudzki, MD
Mitch Salsbery, DPT
Kevin Wilk, DPT, FAPTA