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Distal Biceps Tendon Repair Postop Protocol

Phase 1: Immediate Postoperative (0–2 weeks)

Goals: Protect repair site, control pain/swelling, maintain mobility of uninvolved joints.

- **Immobilization:** Sling worn full-time for 2 weeks except for hygiene and exercises.
- **Weight Bearing:** No lifting, pushing, or pulling with operative arm.
- **ROM:**
 - Elbow: Passive flexion/extension within pain-free range; avoid terminal extension
 - Forearm: Passive pronation/supination in neutral position
 - Shoulder, wrist, and hand: full active motion
- **Exercises:**
 - Grip strengthening
 - Wrist AROM
 - Scapular retraction and shoulder pendulums
- **Precautions:** No active elbow flexion or resisted supination.

Phase 2: Early Rehabilitation (2–6 weeks)

Goals: Gradually restore passive and active-assisted ROM while protecting repair.

- **ROM:**
 - Progress PROM and AAROM toward full by week 6
 - Pronation/supination to tolerance, preferably with elbow flexed to reduce stress
- **Exercises:**
 - Continue shoulder and wrist strengthening
 - Gentle isometric triceps activation in mid-range flexion
- **Precautions:** No active biceps contraction or lifting.

Phase 3: Strength Initiation (6–12 weeks)

Goals: Achieve full ROM, begin light biceps activation, maintain joint stability.

- **ROM:** Full, pain-free elbow and forearm motion
- **Strengthening:**
 - Begin light-resistance biceps curls (1–2 lb or light band) at week 6–8
 - Progressive rotator cuff and scapular strengthening
 - Light forearm pronation/supination resistance

- **Exercises:**
 - Closed-chain UE drills (wall push-ups, quadruped weight shifts)
- **Precautions:** Avoid heavy lifting or ballistic movements.

Phase 4: Advanced Strengthening (12–16 weeks)

Goals: Build functional strength and endurance for return to work or sport.

- **Strengthening:**
 - Progressive biceps loading with free weights or cables
 - Multi-joint upper extremity strengthening (rows, presses)
 - Plyometric ball drills as appropriate
- **Functional Training:**
 - Sport- or job-specific upper extremity drills
 - Grip endurance training

Phase 5: Return to Sport/Work (4–6+ months)

Goals: Full, pain-free ROM and strength $\geq 90\%$ of contralateral limb.

- **Criteria for Return:**
 - No pain or swelling
 - Functional testing $\geq 90\%$ symmetry
 - Successful work/sport simulation without symptoms
 - Surgeon clearance
 - **Exercises:** Unrestricted strengthening, plyometrics, and sport/work tasks
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Key Evidence Notes:

- Early protected motion reduces stiffness without increasing rerupture risk when fixation is secure (Watson et al., 2020)
- Active biceps use is typically delayed until ≥ 6 weeks to protect tendon-to-bone healing (Morrey et al., 2019)
- Gradual, progressive loading over 3–4 months yields excellent outcomes with low complication rates (Haverstock et al., 2021)

