Endeavor Health
Orthopaedic & Spine Institute

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Distal Triceps Tendon Repair: Post-surgical Recovery Process, Expectations, and Timelines

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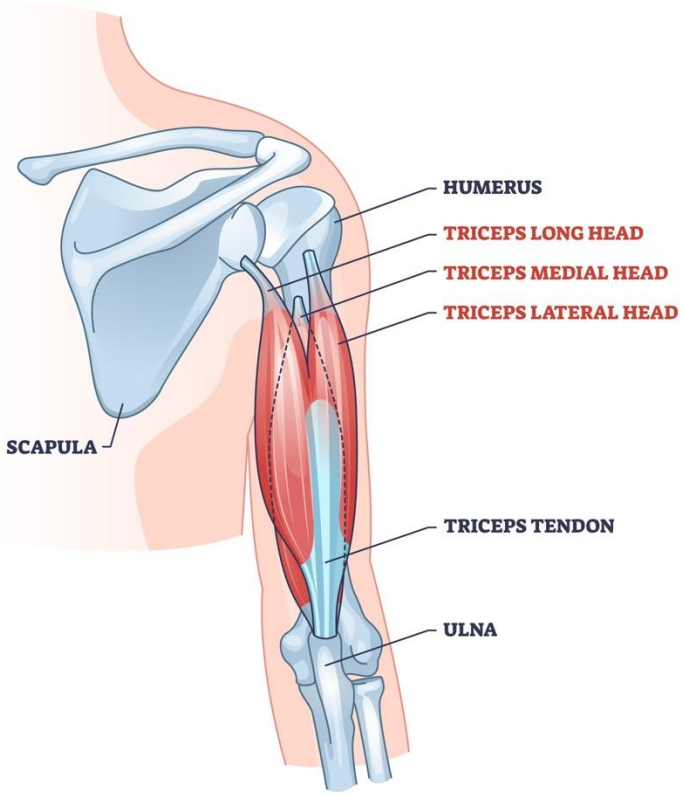
What is the Distal Triceps?

- **Attachment of triceps tendon into back of elbow**
  - Triceps starts at bottom of shoulder joint
  - Muscle runs on back of upper arm
  - Tendon inserts into tip of elbow (olecranon)
- **What does the triceps muscle do?**
  - Extends elbow
  - Allows for push-off, raising up from seated position



How and why does the Distal Triceps tear?

- **Generally occurs to males over age 30**
- **Occurs during eccentric phase of pushing**
  - **Generally from a fall or traumatic injury**
  - **Elbow forcefully pushed into flexion/straightened**
- **Often pre-existing tendinopathy**
  - **Weakened tendon due to overuse, genetics, or combination of reasons**

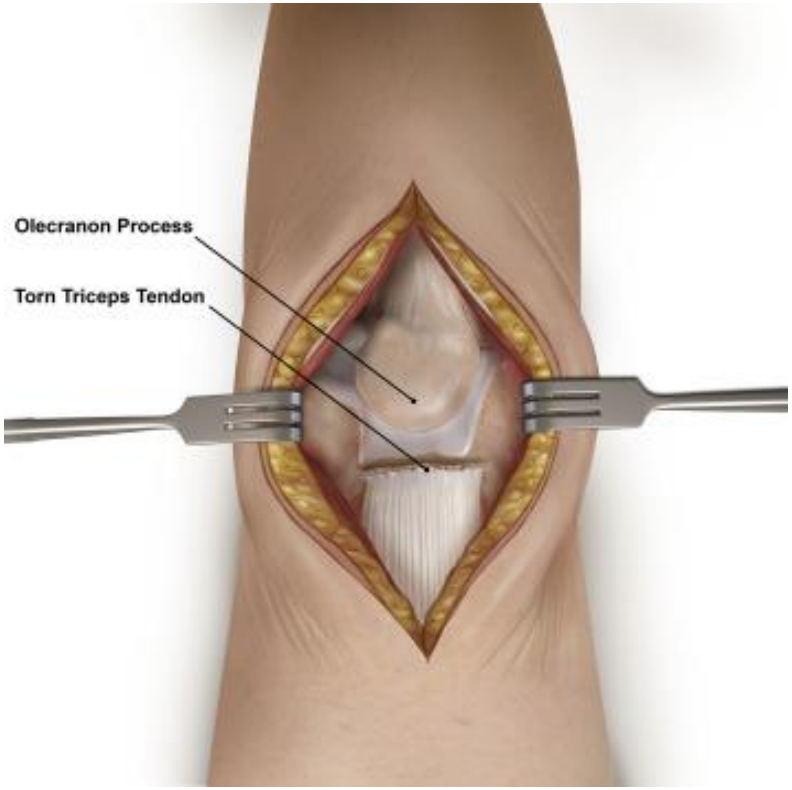


Figure 1: Caldwell PE 3rd, Evensen CS, Vance NG, Pearson SE. Distal Triceps Speed Bridge Repair. Arthrosc Tech. 2018 Aug 13;7(9):e907-e913. doi: 10.1016/j.eats.2018.04.013. PMID: 30258771; PMCID: PMC6153264.

Indications for Distal Triceps Tendon Repair

- Recommended for most patients
  - Important for activities of daily living (ADLs) such as pushing off arms from a seated position
- Restore elbow extension strength
  - Pushing up from seated position
  - Rising from a fall
  - Performing overhead activities
- Functional limitations without surgery
  - Active patients
  - Manual laborers

How is Surgery Performed?

- 30-minute outpatient procedure
- General anesthesia + nerve block
- 1–2-inch incision on front of forearm just below elbow
- Torn tendon and muscle stitched and repaired to bone
  - One metal button
  - One suture anchor

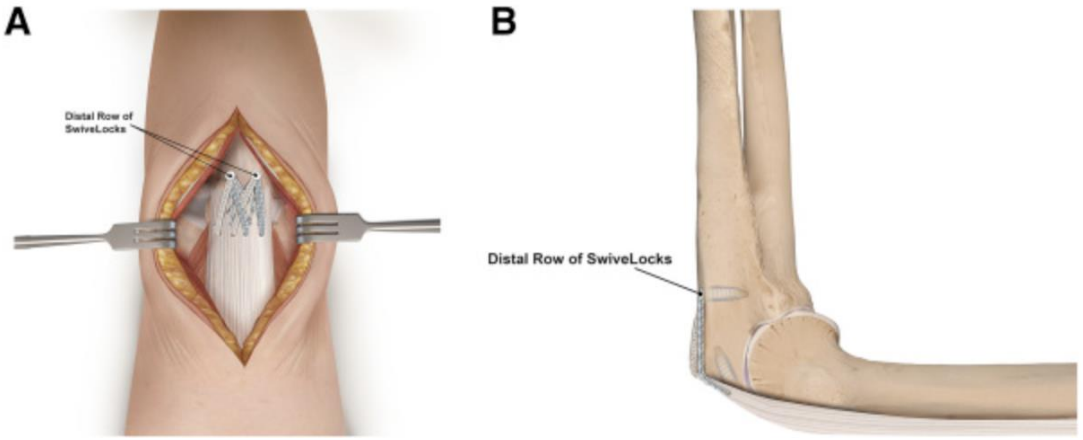


Figure 12: Caldwell PE 3rd, Evensen CS, Vance NG, Pearson SE. Distal Triceps Speed Bridge Repair. Arthrosc Tech. 2018 Aug 13;7(9):e907-e913. doi: 10.1016/j.eats.2018.04.013. PMID: 30258771; PMCID: PMC6153264.

Expectations for Day of Surgery

Day of Surgery: At Surgery Center

- Will arrive to surgery center approximately 2 hours prior to surgery
  - Surgery center will call with specific time day before surgery
- Nothing to eat or drink after midnight
- Shower with Hibiclens night before and morning of surgery
- Time at surgery center:
  - Before surgery: Check in, paperwork, IV placement, meet anesthesia team, nerve block (1-2 hours)
  - Surgery: Roll back to operating room, go to sleep, surgery performed, wake up (1 hour)
  - After surgery: Roll to recovery room. Pain will be controlled. Water and crackers administered. Roll to car for family member/friend to take you home.

Day of Surgery: Home

- Keep splint clean and dry, sling for support
  - Consider purchasing a cast cover (Amazon, Walgreens, CVS)
  - If no cast cover, keep dry with garbage bags and rubber bands
- Limit time on feet
- Light diet on day of surgery - avoid heavy/greasy foods
- Limit narcotic use – do not "stay ahead" of the pain
- Nerve block typically wears off 18-22 hours after administered
  - *Pain will increase, and you may require pain medication*

Day after Surgery: Home

- Resume your regular diet
- Start to increase time on feet/walking around
- May shower the day after surgery
  - Keep splint clean and dry until follow-up visit 2 weeks after surgery
  - Strongly recommend cast cover

Outpatient Physical Therapy

Start no sooner than 2 weeks after Surgery

Elbow brace will be placed at 2 week visit

Outpatient Physical Therapy

Make sure to call ahead, as they often book out weeks in advance

Goals of Physical Therapy

1. Control pain
2. Progressively regain full range of motion following protocol
3. Strengthen muscles around elbow (biceps strengthening @ 3 months)
4. Return to desired activity level

Please discuss goals with Physical Therapist

1. Specific job demands (i.e. manual labor job)
2. Fitness goals
3. Return to sport (competitive/recreational)

Expectations: Symptoms

Time after Surgery	0-2 weeks	2-6 weeks	6 wks-3 months	3-6 months	6 mos - 1 year
Difficulty sleeping					
Pain at rest					
Elbow stiffness	Full Motion by 6 weeks				
Weakness/Atrophy				Improvements out to one year postoperative	
Pain medication needed		NSAIDs/Tylenol	Minimal	None	None

Note: *Recovery timelines are general expectations and vary from person to person based on a variety of factors including tear retraction, baseline strength and activity level, compliance with postoperative instructions including home exercises and physical therapy, and other health factors.*

Expectations: Function

Activity	Immediately	2-6 weeks	6-12 weeks	3-4 months	4-6 months	6+ months
Texting and typing						
Driving						
Desk work (with sling*)		*				
Sleeping in recliner/upright						
Sleeping in bed						
Lifting 1-5 pounds						
Lifting 10+ pounds at/above shoulder height						
Basic housework (cleaning)						
Reaching a high shelf						
Light manual labor						
Heavy manual labor (discuss with MD)						
Sports (discuss with MD)						

Note: *Recovery timelines are general expectations and vary from person to person based on a variety of factors including tear size/retraction, baseline strength and activity level, compliance with postoperative instructions*

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Questions?

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