Fraser Orthopaedic Institute
Physiotherapy Protocols
403 - 233 Nelson's Crescent New Westminster BC V3L0E4

Elbow Release (Capsulectomy): Postoperative Protocol

These procedures may be done either open or arthroscopically. The focus is on maintenance of the range of motion regained at surgery. If a significant flexion contracture existed before surgery an ulnar nerve transposition is likely as ulnar nerve symptoms can occur once the motion arc is regained.

In open procedures, the extensor wad is filleted off of the lateral supracondylar ridge of the distal humerus and this must heal before any strengthening is started. Thus resistive exercises for wrist extension and supination should be withheld for 6 weeks.

***Inpatient**: (0-3 days)*
• Extension splint for first 24 hours to reduce postoperative swelling and prevent hematoma formation

ROM
• Instruct in home program and begin active assisted elbow range of motion in flexion/extension and pronation/supination as tolerated (no limits in range)
• Instruct in home program and begin pendulums and active shoulder ROM exercises

STRENGTH
• Instruct in home program, and begin, grip strengthening

MODALITIES
• Instruct on proper use of ice or cryocuff
• 20-30 minutes at a time, several times per day, especially after exercises
• Arrange for outpatient physical follow-up to begin on day after clinic follow-up

Wound Instructions
• Mepore dressing to wound q day until dressing totally dry
• May shower at 10 days but no bath or hot tub for 3 weeks

***Outpatient Phase 1:** (Hospital Discharge to Week 4)*
ROM
• Continue flexion/extension and pronation/supination exercises
• All motion may be active and active-assisted
• Add static progressive splinting (Mayo elbow brace) if necessary

STRENGTH
• Continue grip strengthening

MODALITIES
• Ultrasound to anterior elbow may help decrease scar tissue formation and aid in recovery of full extension
• Incision mobilization and desensitization
• Modalities for pain, inflammation and edema control
• Cryotherapy as needed
• Ulnar nerve massage and desensitization

***Outpatient Phase 2**: (Weeks 5 to 8)*
ROM
• Continue ROM

STRENGTH
• Add strengthening program for elbow and wrist flexion/extension and pronation/supination

MODALITIES
• Continue scar massage

***Outpatient Phase 3**: (Weeks 9 -12)*
ROM
• Goal of full ROM