

# Total Elbow Replacement

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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## What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a group of conditions that cause damage to one or more joints.

The most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis, where there is gradual wear and tear of a joint.

Some other types of arthritis are associated with inflammation of the joints that can eventually lead to severe joint damage.

Arthritis eventually wears away the normal cartilage covering the surface of the joint and the bone underneath becomes damaged. This causes pain and stiffness in the joint, which can interfere with normal activities.

## What are the benefits of surgery?

You should get less pain and be able to move your arm more easily.

## Are there any alternatives to a total elbow replacement?

Simple painkillers such as paracetamol and anti-inflammatory painkillers such as ibuprofen can help control the pain of arthritis.

A steroid injection into your elbow joint can sometimes reduce pain and stiffness for several months.

Sometimes it is possible to have a smaller operation to remove inflamed tissue from your elbow joint (synovectomy).

All these measures become less effective if your arthritis gets worse and this is when your surgeon may recommend an elbow replacement.

## What does the operation involve?

Various anaesthetic techniques are possible. The operation usually takes 1 to 2 hours.

Your surgeon will make a cut on the back of your elbow and remove the damaged joint surfaces. They will replace these with an artificial elbow made with metal, plastic or ceramic, or a combination of these materials.

Your elbow replacement is fixed into the bone using acrylic cement.

## How can I prepare myself for the operation?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Speak to the healthcare team about any vaccinations you might need to reduce your risk of serious illness while you recover. When you come into hospital, practise hand washing and wear a face covering when asked.

## What complications can happen?

Some complications can be serious and can even cause death.

### General complications of any operation

- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- Chest infection
- Venous thromboembolism
- Heart attack
- Stroke

### Specific complications of this operation

- Damage to nerves around your elbow
- Infection
- Loosening
- Dislocation of your elbow replacement
- Fracture (break) around your elbow replacement
- Severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of your hand
- Inability to bend your elbow well

- Surgery to redo (revise) the elbow replacement

## Illustrator

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## Consequences of this procedure

- Pain
- Unsightly scarring of your skin

## How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home after 2 to 5 days.

You will need to use a support for your elbow for 6 weeks.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Most people make a good recovery, have less pain, and can move their elbow better. An artificial elbow never feels quite the same as a normal elbow.

An elbow replacement can wear out with time.

## Summary

An elbow replacement is usually suitable for people who have arthritis. If you have severe pain, stiffness and disability, an elbow replacement should reduce your pain and help you to move your arm more easily.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

## Acknowledgements

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