

Elbow Arthroscopy



Treating
Common
Problems

What Is Arthroscopy?

Your joints help you move freely. But living with a worn or injured joint can make an active lifestyle painful. Your orthopaedic surgeon has suggested **arthroscopy** to look inside your elbow joint. Read on to learn more about preparing for surgery and the recovery time that will follow. After arthroscopy, you may be able to return to many of the activities you once enjoyed.

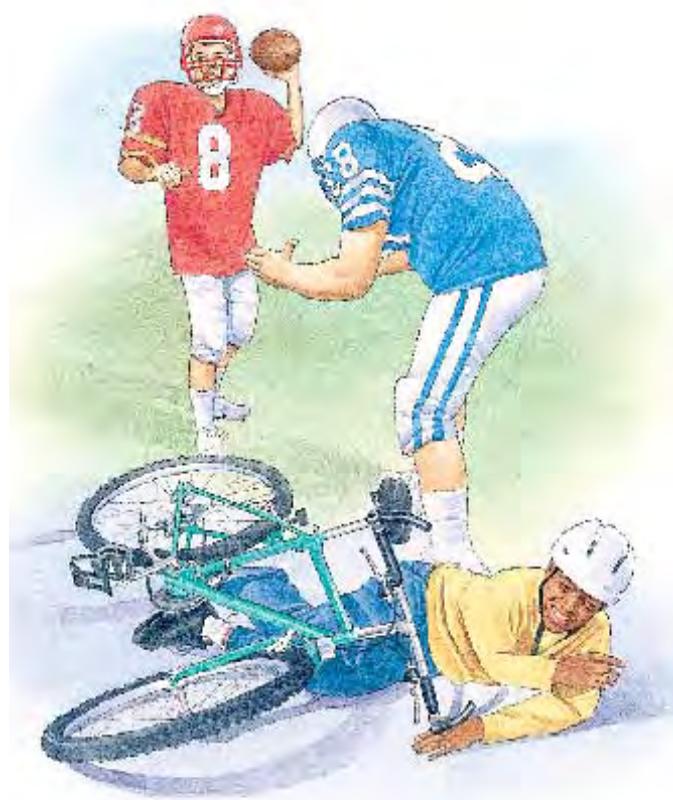
Arthroscopy and Your Injury

Arthroscopy can be used to diagnose or treat your elbow problem. A problem may be **chronic** (ongoing) or **acute** (sudden). Constant use of the elbow over time can lead to chronic problems. An acute injury can result from a sudden fall, blow, or twisting motion.

Why Arthroscopy?

Arthroscopy is often a good way to do joint surgery. Why? Because:

- The surgeon can often find and treat the problem during one procedure.
- The surgeon can often see the joint better than with open surgery.
- Smaller incisions are used than with open surgery. As a result, you may recover faster and have less scarring.



How Arthroscopy Works

To look inside your elbow, your surgeon will use an **arthroscope**. This is a slender instrument that contains a lens and a light source. The arthroscope and other special tools are inserted into the elbow joint through **portals** (tiny incisions). Using a camera, the arthroscope sends an image of your elbow to a **monitor** (TV screen). This lets your surgeon see your joint more clearly.



During arthroscopy, sterile fluid flows through one of the portals. This expands the joint, giving your surgeon room to work.



You probably can return to most of your normal activities after recovering from arthroscopy.

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Your Evaluation

Your plans for arthroscopy will begin with a visit to your surgeon. At this time, you may need to answer questions about your elbow problem. Your surgeon will check your elbow and may order special tests. This process will help your surgeon learn more about your elbow problem and plan treatment.

Health History

You may need to provide details about your family's health history. Also, be sure to mention all the medications you take.

You are likely to be asked:

- When and how your injury occurred
- Which activities affect your pain
- What treatments you have tried so far



Your surgeon will check your joint for signs of injury.

Checking Your Joint

Your elbow will be checked for signs of injury. These signs include swelling, tenderness, decreased range of motion, clicking or catching, and weakness.

Diagnostic Imaging Tests

Imaging tests may be done to assess your joint. Such tests include:

- **X-ray**, which can reveal abnormal bone structures, such as bone spurs.
- **MRI** (magnetic resonance imaging), which can show damage to soft tissues.
- **CT** (computed tomography), which uses a computer and x-rays to show changes in soft tissues and bones.

Before Your Arthroscopy

The medical staff will help you prepare for arthroscopy. They may ask for the results of any recent checkup or special tests. You will be told how to prepare at home for surgery. Someone will also talk with you about the type of anesthesia to be used. Finally, you will learn whether you should plan to spend the night at the hospital.

Getting Ready at Home

At home before surgery:

- Don't eat or drink after the midnight before surgery. This includes coffee.
- Ask in advance if you can take any daily medication the day of surgery.
- Stop taking anti-inflammatory medicine, such as aspirin, 7 to 10 days before surgery.
- If you smoke, now is the time to stop.
- Arrange for a ride home after surgery.



Planning for Anesthesia

Before surgery, you will be told about the type of anesthesia that will keep you free of pain during arthroscopy. **General anesthesia** lets you sleep through surgery. **Regional** and **local anesthesia** numb only part of your body. They may be given with drugs that will help you relax.



Risks of Arthroscopy

As with any surgery, arthroscopy involves some risks. These are rare, but include:

- Excess bleeding
- Blood clots
- Infection
- Instrument failure in surgery
- Damage to nerves and blood vessels
- A shift to open surgery that would require a larger incision

Arthroscopy of the Elbow

Arthroscopy is used to find and treat many types of elbow problems. These include loose bodies and bone spurs.

The Healthy Elbow

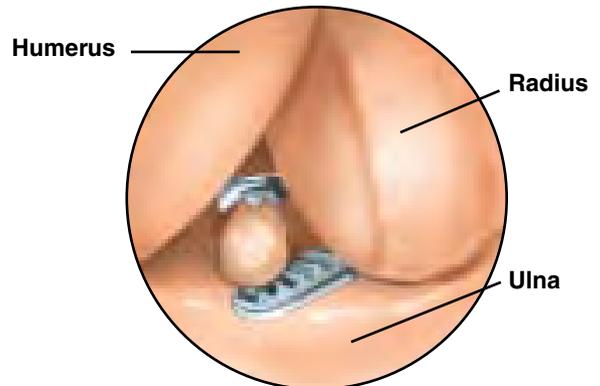
The elbow plays two roles: It lets the arm bend and straighten, and it allows the palm to turn up and down. This joint connects the two forearm bones (**ulna** and **radius**) with the upper arm bone (**humerus**). Inside the joint, **cartilage** covering the bones keeps the elbow moving smoothly.



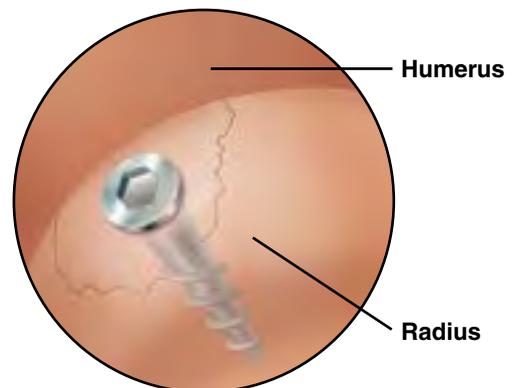
Common Elbow Problems

Loose Bodies

Loose bodies are bone or cartilage fragments that have chipped off inside the joint. In some cases, loss of blood supply to a piece of bone (due to injury) can cause it to loosen. If left in place, loose bodies can damage the joint surface and restrict ankle movement. They can also cause pain and swelling. Your surgeon can remove loose bodies from the joint or secure a loose piece of bone in place. This will help restore normal, smooth elbow motion.



A loose body is removed from the elbow joint.



The affected piece of bone is secured in place.

Bone Spurs

Bone spurs (growths) in a joint can cause the bones to pinch one another (**impinge**). These growths can cause pain and restrict movement. The ulna is the most common site for bone spurs in the elbow. To treat your problem, the surgeon will remove the spur and smooth the bone surface.



A bone spur is removed from the elbow joint.

After Arthroscopy

At home, follow your surgeon's guidelines for healing:

- Elevate and ice your elbow to reduce swelling.
- Keep your elbow compressed in a sling, bandage, or splint.
- When you shower, cover your elbow with plastic to keep it dry.
- Take pain medication as directed.

The Road to Recovery

After surgery, your joint may be swollen, painful, and stiff. Recovery times vary, depending on what was done. With bone removal, you may be told to bend and straighten your arm soon after surgery. This will help restore normal movement. With OCD repair, recovery takes longer. Your surgeon will tell you when to resume activity.



You may be told to bend and straighten your arm a few times each day.

Your Surgical List

The list below outlines what to do before and after arthroscopy. If you have questions, be sure to get them answered before the procedure.

Before Surgery

- See your surgeon. Have any tests that your surgeon orders.
- Stop taking aspirin and other medications as advised by your surgeon before surgery.
- If you smoke, now is a good time to stop. This will reduce the risk of surgical complications.
- Do not eat or drink anything as instructed before surgery.
- Arrange for someone to drive you home from surgery.

After Surgery

- Schedule your first follow-up visit as instructed after surgery.
- Take care of your incisions as directed.
- Complete your physical therapy program if one is prescribed.
- Ask your surgeon which activities you can do right away and what you should avoid.

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