



TWIN CITIES ORTHOPEDICS

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ULNAR COLLATERAL LIGAMENT RECONSTRUCTION/REPAIR

Introduction

The following information is provided to help you progress smoothly through your ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) operation. Use this handout along with the pre-operative instruction packet that will help you schedule your surgery, doctor visits, and physical therapy.

Before surgery

You are required to undergo a general medical evaluation prior to surgery. If you have any serious pre-existing medical condition(s), you may need to see your doctor(s) before going ahead with surgery.

As well, it is preferred that you meet with your physical therapist prior to your surgery. They will provide you with simple instructions for after surgery, as well as arrange your post-operative therapy sessions.

Anesthesia

You will meet the anesthesiologist on the day of your surgery. The specifics of the anesthesia used for your surgery will be discussed with you at that time. Typically, the operation is performed under a regional anesthetic (nerve block) that will numb the arm, elbow, and forearm. The anesthesiologist will also provide medication to make you comfortable during the procedure. The nerve block also provides pain relief after the procedure.

Surgery

You will be undergoing either a repair or reconstruction of the UCL. The surgery is typically performed as an outpatient (you go home the same day). Occasionally, it is desirable to have you stay in the hospital overnight. This will be discussed with you ahead of time.

The surgery is done through a single 10 cm (approximately 3 to 4 inch) incision on the inner portion of the elbow. In addition, 2 to 3 small incisions are used on the same forearm to obtain the free tendon graft to complete the reconstruction. In patients that do not have this desired tendon in their forearm, an alternative tendon is selected, either from the knee (hamstring tendon) or the ankle (portion of the Achilles tendon). This will be discussed with you ahead of time. The surgery typically lasts about 2 hours. Complications are **unusual** with UCL surgery, but can and occasionally do occur. Potential complications include bleeding, infection, side effects or complications from anesthesia, nerve injury or muscle weakness, stiffness, persistent pain, and failure of the repair or reconstruction.

After surgery

You will be given a post-operative instruction sheet on the day of your surgery. This will give you specific information regarding the care of your dressings and splint, and the use of pain medication. Please refer to that sheet after your surgery.

You are required to wear a splint and sling for protection for 10 days following your operation. Your surgeon will instruct you when you can quit using these devices.

Your physical therapy begins 10 days after surgery. You will be given a therapy referral form on the day of your surgery. Please give this to your therapist at your first therapy visit. It provides the therapist with specific instructions on rehabilitating your elbow. Typically, you attend physical therapy sessions 1-2 days per week for 6-12 weeks following surgery. This is adjusted according to your progress, and will be decided by you, the surgeon, and the therapist.

You will return to see the surgeon at 1-2 days, 10 days, 6 weeks, 3 months, 6 months, and one year following surgery. The purpose of these visits is to monitor your progress, and ensure that you are making the smoothest and best possible recovery. It is important that you schedule and maintain these regular visits.

Activity

While wearing your sling and splint, you will be allowed to perform certain table-top and hygiene activities once you are comfortable. However, you are not to remove the dressings or splint until cleared by your surgeon and therapist. Most patients resume desk or computer work in 1-2 weeks. Those who perform manual labor or jobs that involve heavier use of the arm will be required to switch to "light duty", or avoid work altogether for anywhere from 4 weeks to 3 months. (Note: these times are estimates; you may recover at a slower or faster rate.)

Discomfort is not unusual as you recover after surgery. In many instances, this persists to some degree for 4-6 weeks following surgery. Any problems that continue beyond that point will be investigated accordingly.

Total recovery time following surgery is variable and depends on many factors. Most people return to full, unrestricted athletic use of the elbow in 12-18 months after surgery. However, this depends on the type of activity desired. Lighter activities recover more quickly; more strenuous activities take longer to return.

Questions

If you have any questions either before or after your surgery, do not hesitate to contact Dr. Lervick's office at **952-456-7111**.