



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HAND THERAPISTS™

PATIENT EDUCATION RESOURCE

Total Elbow Arthroplasty

“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

Marybeth Ezaki, MD, Past President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand

What is a total elbow arthroplasty?

A total elbow arthroplasty is the surgical replacement of the bones near the elbow. The elbow joint is made up of three bones: the bone of the upper arm (the humerus) and the two forearm bones (the radius, which is located on the thumb side of the forearm, and the ulna, which is located on the small finger side of the forearm). Replacing the elbow joint will allow the elbow to move better with less pain.

What causes someone to need a total elbow arthroplasty?

Several conditions can cause elbow joint damage. These conditions can include arthritis and broken bones in the elbow joint. When the elbow joint is injured, there might be pain, stiffness or instability. An elbow replacement can be an option for pain relief, increased range of motion, strength and improved function.



Pain and stiffness in the elbow joint

What should I expect after surgery?

Swelling, pain and stiffness in the first few days after surgery are normal. Typically, this surgery will require a stay in the hospital. The medical team will provide education on how to manage pain and swelling, wound care and activities of daily living. A therapist will provide gentle motion to the shoulder, elbow, wrist and hand. A total elbow arthroplasty will change how the arm can be used during activities. There may be permanent restrictions in lifting, pushing, pulling or any activity that strains the elbow. Often patients are told not to lift anything more than 5 pounds.



X-ray of total elbow arthroplasty

What can a hand therapist do for me after a total elbow arthroplasty?

To protect the elbow, the hand therapist will make a protective custom orthosis for the elbow, and will provide education and exercises to gently progress the range of motion and strength in the arm. Immediate elbow motion after surgery will help achieve the best possible outcome, and your hand therapist will guide this process along the way.

To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit the American Society of Hand Therapists at www.asht.org or call 856-380-6856.