



Elbow Conditions – Distal biceps tendon tear/rupture (at the elbow)

What is the condition?

The biceps is a muscle located in your upper arm. It is connected to the bone by three tendons, two at the shoulder and one at the elbow.

A distal biceps tendon tear occurs at the elbow, when the tendon connecting the biceps to the bone is torn or detached from the bone.

What causes the condition?

The most common cause is a sudden injury and is rarely associated with other medical conditions.

Injury occurs when the elbow is forced straight against resistance, such as trying to stop a heavy object from falling, or the reverse, when trying to lift an object that is too heavy for that arm alone.

When a biceps tendon at the elbow ruptures, the other arm muscles will compensate so it doesn't always stop the elbow moving through a full range of motion.

What are the signs and symptoms of the condition?

Symptoms of a biceps tendon rupture at the elbow include:

- Swelling at the front-side of the elbow
- Visible bruising at the elbow and forearm
- A gap in the front of the elbow from the absence of the tendon
- A change in the appearance of the biceps muscle (just above the elbow)
- Feelings of weakness when bending the elbow
- Weakness when twisting the forearm

How is the condition diagnosed?

One of our elbow surgeons, Mr Soong Chua or Mr Jason Harvey, will begin with your medical history and a physical examination to assess your pain and range of movement before moving onto imaging tests such as x-rays, ultrasound or an MRI scan to see if the tear is partial or complete.

What are the treatment options?

Mr Harvey or Mr Chua may suggest different treatments depending on how severe the tear is. Non-surgical treatment could include:

- Rest
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medication
- Activity modifications
- Physiotherapy to try to regain strength and range of motion

To regain full strength and function, surgery to reattach the tendon is usually necessary. If this is deemed necessary, Mr Chua or Mr Harvey will then discuss the surgical options to repair the bicep tendon with you.