

## TOTAL ELBOW ARTHROPLASTY

### What Can I Expect?

#### **KEVIN KO, MD**

Shoulder and Elbow Surgeon

OPA Orthopedics

Seattle, WA

#### ***What is a Total Elbow Arthroplasty?***

A total elbow arthroplasty (elbow replacement) is a surgical procedure in which parts of an arthritic joint are replaced with a prosthesis or artificial parts. One part fits into the humerus (upper arm), and the other part fits into the ulnar (forearm). The two parts are then connected and held together through a hinge. This artificial joint is designed to move like a normal, healthy joint.

#### ***How do you replace the elbow?***

The prosthesis will be placed through an incision down the back of the elbow. The humeral and the ulnar components are cemented into place. The two parts then fit together like a hinge.

#### ***Length of Stay***

Typically, you will spend two nights in the hospital after this surgery. You will need to have someone to drive you home after you have been discharged.

#### ***Anesthesia***

Patients usually have two types of anesthesia for this surgery. The first is general anesthesia, which means you are asleep and unaware during the surgery. The second type of anesthesia is a nerve block which numbs the operative arm. The nerve block will last about 12-18 hours and during this period you will not be able to control your arm and it will feel strange to you. The anesthesiologist will speak to you on the day of surgery. The ultimate choice of anesthesia technique is up to you and your anesthesiologist.

#### ***Incision***

You will have an incision down the back of your elbow. After the incision has healed, it is usually very thin and not very noticeable.

#### ***Pain***

All surgical procedures are associated with some discomfort and all patients perceive pain differently. In general, the pain associated with this procedure is well controlled with the pain medication that will be prescribed for you in the hospital and prior to discharge for you to take when you get home. After the nerve block wears off you will have discomfort that may not have been present initially after the surgery.

***Splint***

Your arm will be placed in a splint prior to leaving the operating room. The splint will be removed before you go home for you to initiate a home stretching program.

***Dressings***

You will go home with gauze dressings covered with ace wraps. You are to leave those in place until your first post operative visit (10-14 days after the day of surgery). You may cover the dressings with a plastic trash bag to keep them dry while showering. Under the dressings are staples. These also will be removed at your first follow up visit.

***Physical Therapy***

Before leaving the hospital you will be taught your home exercise program. For the three months of recovery you will do these very gentle stretches at home to help you to get the best possible motion out of your elbow.

***Restrictions***

Recovery from total elbow replacement is about three months although different patients recover at different rates. During that time you will have restrictions on the use of your operative arm. You may drive when you feel that you can properly control a car and you are **NOT** taking narcotic pain medication.

<b>First 6 weeks:</b>	no lifting, no weight-bearing
<b>Weeks 6-12:</b>	no repetitive lifting greater than 5 lbs
<b>Long-Term:</b>	repetitive lifting greater than 10-15 lbs discouraged