DR. KAISEN YAO, MD

ORTHOPEDIC SPORTS MEDICINE SURGEON

Post-Operative Physical Therapy Protocol

Elbow Arthroscopy

Northwell Health • Department of Orthopedic Surgery & Sports Medicine • Dr. Kaisen Yao, MD

Patient Name	Date of Surgery	Prescribing Surgeon
		Dr. Kaisen Yao, MD

General Guidelines & Precautions

- The elbow stiffens easily after surgery — early, frequent motion is one of the most important parts of recovery.
- Prioritize swelling control with ice, compression, and elevation.
- Follow surgeon-specific guidance on weight bearing through the arm and any procedure-specific restrictions (for example, if a loose body was removed versus a more extensive debridement or release).
- Contact the surgeon for fever, excessive drainage, increasing redness, uncontrolled pain, new numbness or tingling, or rapidly worsening stiffness.

PHASE I
Immediate Post-Op & Motion

TIMEFRAME
DAYS 0–10

Goals:
Control pain and swelling, and begin early range of motion to prevent stiffness.

Interventions:
Cryotherapy, compression, elevation, gentle active and active-assisted elbow flexion/extension and forearm pronation/supination, wrist and hand range of motion, and gentle grip work.

Precautions:
Avoid forceful passive stretching and heavy lifting through the arm in the first days after surgery.

Criteria to Progress:
Wound healing well, pain controlled, and improving elbow range of motion.

PHASE II

Progressive Motion & Early Strengthening

TIMEFRAME

WEEKS 2–4

Goals:
Restore full, pain-free elbow and forearm range of motion, and begin light strengthening.

Interventions:
Progress active and gentle passive stretching into flexion/extension and pronation/supination, light gripping and wrist strengthening, and gentle isometric elbow strengthening.

Criteria to Progress:
Near-full range of motion, minimal swelling, and good tolerance of light strengthening.

PHASE III

Strengthening & Function

TIMEFRAME

WEEKS 4–8

Goals:
Restore full strength and range of motion for daily and work-related activities.

Interventions:
Progressive resistance exercises for elbow flexion/extension, forearm rotation, wrist, and grip; functional lifting progression as tolerated.

Criteria to Progress:
Full range of motion, strength approaching the uninvolved side, and no pain with functional tasks.

PHASE IV

Return to Activity

TIMEFRAME

WEEKS 8–12+

Goals:
Return to unrestricted work, recreation, or sport.

Interventions:
Sport- or task-specific strengthening and progressive loading as needed.

Return to Sport/Work:
Return to throwing, racquet sports, or heavy manual labor should follow surgeon and therapist clearance based on strength and motion.

Discharge Criteria:
Full pain-free range of motion, symmetrical strength, and safe mechanics with functional and sport-specific tasks.

This protocol is a general guideline. Progression should be individualized by the treating physical therapist in coordination with Dr. Yao's office based on the specific arthroscopic procedure performed.