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# TOTAL ELBOW REPLACEMENT

This leaflet provides general information to help you understand total elbow replacement (TER), an operation to replace a worn or damaged elbow joint with an artificial one.

**This procedure replaces the worn elbow joint with a metal implant to relieve pain and restore function.**

At the heart of my practice is **Shared Decision-Making**. Whether we pursue conservative management (Plan A) or surgical intervention (Plan B), the goal is to create a tailored treatment plan that aligns with your lifestyle, values, and functional goals.

*This leaflet provides general information and does not replace individual medical advice.*

**Private Consulting Rooms**
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More Info
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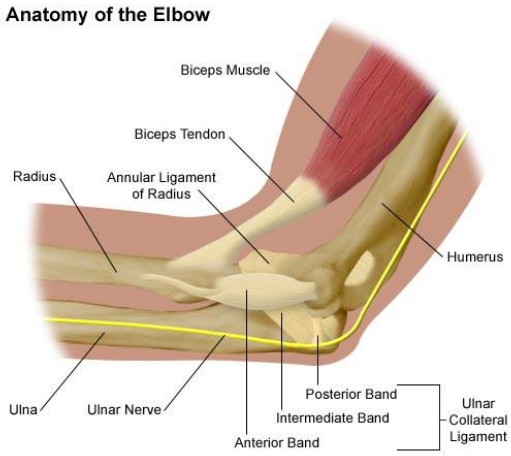
# The Anatomy of the Elbow

The elbow is a hinged joint connecting the upper arm to the forearm, relying on several structures for stability and movement:

### How the Elbow Works

The joint connects:

- Humerus (upper arm bone)
- Radius and Ulna (forearm bones)
- A smooth cartilage lining that can wear out




### What Is Elbow Replacement?

The worn ends of the elbow joint are removed and replaced with a metal component for the humerus and a bushing around the ulna, which are then linked together.

### Why It May Be Needed

Elbow replacement is most often advised for:

- Arthritis not helped by other treatments
- Severe pain limiting daily activities
- Some complex fractures in lower-demand patients
- Loss of function and movement

### Common Symptoms

- Persistent elbow pain
- Stiffness and reduced movement
- Difficulty with everyday tasks
- Pain not relieved by injections

### Other Options

Steroid or visco-supplementation injections and elbow arthroscopy are usually tried first. Replacement is considered when these have not helped and pain continues to affect daily life.

# About the Operation

A 15–18 cm incision is made at the back of the elbow. The worn joint ends are removed and replaced with a metal implant, which is then linked together. The wound is closed with dissolvable sutures and a back slab (half cast) applied. Most patients stay one night in hospital.

### At a Glance: Benefits

The operation aims to:

- Relieve the pain of a worn or arthritic elbow
- Restore smoother, more comfortable movement
- Improve function for everyday activities

### The Procedure, Step by Step

The operation, step by step:

- Incision: made at the back of the elbow
- Removal: the worn ends of the joint are removed
- Implant: metal components are fitted and linked together
- Closure: dissolvable sutures, dressing and a back slab

## Before, During & After Surgery

### Before Surgery

- Fasting: no food for 6 hours, no drinks for 2 hours before
- Smoking: avoid for at least 12 hours before, to aid healing
- Medications: continue as advised by the pre-assessment team

### On the Day

- Admission: check in at main reception, then to your room
- Consultation: meet your surgeon and anaesthetist
- Hospital stay: most patients go home the day after surgery

### Anaesthesia

- General anaesthetic combined with a nerve block
- The nerve block numbs the arm and helps control pain after surgery

## Recovery & Results

Recovery is a partnership. The timeline below is a guide — your physiotherapist and I will adapt it to you — **this shared decision-making process ensures you are fully informed and involved in your care.**

### Recovery Milestones

- Back slab & sling: worn for about 2 weeks
- Exercises: begin before you go home
- Brace: an elbow brace may follow for 4–6 weeks
- Recovery: rehabilitation typically 4–6 months (up to a year)

### Results

An artificial elbow usually lasts 10–12 years. It can loosen sooner with heavy use, so lifelong care is needed to protect the implant.

### After Surgery

*The first weeks*

**Sling:** a back slab and high-arm sling are used for about 2 weeks; a brace may follow for 4–6 weeks

**Pain Relief:** the nerve block lasts 12–24 hours; start painkillers on returning home and take them regularly for at least 48 hours

**Wound Care:** dissolvable sutures are tied over the skin and removed by the nurse at 14 days; keep the wound clean and dry

**Physiotherapy:** a physiotherapist gives you exercises before discharge; rehabilitation typically takes 4–6 months and sometimes up to a year

### Risks & Complications

*Uncommon, but possible*

**Stiffness:** mild stiffness is common; occasionally more marked stiffness can prolong recovery by a few months

**Infection:** uncommon; may require antibiotics and, rarely, further surgery, and can shorten the life of the implant

**Persistent Pain:** common for the first few weeks but steadily settles; ongoing pain after 3 months may need investigation

**Loosening:** the implant usually lasts 10–12 years, then may need replacing; sooner with infection or heavy manual use

**Other Risks:** occasional small bone cracks during surgery, usually mild and temporary nerve symptoms, or new bone formation (about 10%)

## *Return to Work & Living With Your New Elbow*

### *Living with your new elbow — do's and don'ts*

- **Work:** sedentary roles 4–6 weeks; jobs involving lifting 8–12 weeks
- **Driving:** usually 6–8 weeks, once comfortable with good movement; tell your insurer
- **Lifting:** never lift more than a glass of water for the first 6 weeks; avoid pushing up from a chair
- **Sport:** swimming 6–8 weeks (breaststroke first), golf around 12–16 weeks
- **For life:** avoid contact sports and repetitive heavy lifting to protect the implant

### *Red Flags — When to Seek Urgent Help*

**Spreading redness, discharge or a fever, worsening pain, or numbness and a cold hand — seek urgent assessment. If you experience any of the above, contact the practice, your GP, NHS 111, or attend your nearest Emergency Department.**

### *Key Points to Remember*

- **Replaces a worn or arthritic elbow joint**
- **Relieves pain and improves function**
- **Never lift more than a glass of water for 6 weeks**
- **Avoid heavy lifting and contact sports for life**

### *Questions You May Wish to Ask*

- **How long will the implant last?**
- **When can I drive and return to work?**
- **How much improvement can I expect?**
- **What can I safely lift and do?**

### *Book or Enquire Directly at Each Site*

- **LIPS Healthcare London** ☎ 020 7164 6114
- **Spire Alexandra Chatham** ☎ 01634 687166
- **Practice Plus Gillingham** ☎ 0333 200 4055