

MUSCLE STRAIN — SHOULDER & ARM

Biceps Strain

Understanding your injury and getting back to full speed

WHAT IS IT?

The biceps flexes the elbow and rotates the forearm; its long head runs through the front of the shoulder. Strains occur in the muscle belly or at the long-head tendon without complete rupture.

A **strain** means muscle fibers were overstretched. We grade strains I–III: **Grade I** — mild, microscopic fiber injury; **Grade II** — moderate, a partial tear with strength loss; **Grade III** — severe, complete disruption.

HOW IT HAPPENS

Heavy or fast curls, forceful pulling, or a controlled load that suddenly slips.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Front-of-arm or front-of-shoulder pain with curling and lifting, tenderness in the muscle belly, occasional cramping sensation with use.

HOW LONG RECOVERY TAKES

- **Grade I:** 1–2 weeks
- **Grade II:** 3–6 weeks
- **Grade III:** 6–10 weeks

TREATMENT

Almost all muscle strains heal without surgery. For the first 72 hours: relative rest, ice 15–20 minutes several times daily, compression, and *gentle* motion — complete rest slows healing. Then a progressive program: pain-free motion → isometrics → strengthening → **eccentric loading** (strengthening the muscle while it lengthens — the phase that prevents re-injury) → sport-specific work.

Progressive elbow flexion/supination strengthening; address shoulder mechanics if the long head is involved.

RETURNING TO SPORT

Return when strength is at least **90% of the other side**, motion is full and pain-free, and you can perform your sport's movements at full speed without hesitation. Returning before the muscle is re-strengthened is the main cause of re-injury.

PREVENTING THE NEXT ONE

Balanced pulling/pushing programs and progressive load increases.

WHEN TO CALL US

A sudden pop with a new bulge in the arm (“Popeye” deformity) means the tendon has ruptured — usually still a benign problem at the shoulder, but at the ELBOW a rupture needs urgent evaluation because early repair matters.

CALL THE OFFICE RIGHT AWAY

Pain not controlled by medication, fever over 101.5°F, spreading redness or warmth, or new numbness or weakness. Direct office line (513) 441-5639; after hours (513) 354-3700.



SCAN FOR THE LATEST VERSION ONLINE

robertpettitmd.com/handouts/biceps-strain.pdf

This handout is for general patient education and does not replace personalized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given by Dr. Pettit and your care team.