

MUSCLE STRAIN — SHOULDER & ARM

Triceps Strain

Understanding your injury and getting back to full speed

WHAT IS IT?

The triceps straightens the elbow and stabilizes pressing movements. Strains occur in the muscle belly; complete tears at the elbow attachment are a distinct, more serious injury.

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 pressing or extension work (dips, close-grip bench, skull-crushers), or a sudden eccentric load such as breaking a fall.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Back-of-arm pain with pressing or straightening the elbow against resistance, tenderness of the muscle belly, occasional bruising.

HOW LONG RECOVERY TAKES

- **Grade I:** 1–2 weeks
- **Grade II:** 3–5 weeks
- **Grade III:** 6–8 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-extension strengthening from isometrics to eccentric loading.

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

Progressive pressing loads and adequate recovery between heavy sessions.

WHEN TO CALL US

Pain and a defect just above the point of the elbow after a fall or forced bend — especially with weak extension — suggests a distal triceps rupture and needs prompt evaluation for early repair.

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/triceps-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.