

# Biceps Tendon Injury

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## KEY POINTS

- A biceps tendon injury is a problem with the tendons that connect the muscle in the front part of your upper arm to the bones in your elbow and shoulder.
  - You will need to change or stop doing the activities that cause pain until the tendon has healed and is no longer painful.
  - Treatment may include stretching and strengthening exercises, wearing a cast or a sling for several weeks, medicine, or surgery to repair the tendon.
  - Warm-up exercises and stretching before activities may help prevent injuries.
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## What is a biceps tendon injury?

A biceps tendon injury is a problem with the tendons that connect the muscle in the front part of your upper arm to the bones in your elbow and shoulder. Tendons are strong bands of tissue that connect muscle to bone. You use the biceps muscle and tendons when you bend and turn your arm.

Tendons can be injured suddenly, or they may be slowly damaged over time. You can have tiny or partial tears in your tendon. If you have a complete tear of your tendon, it is called a rupture. Other tendon injuries may be called a strain, tendinosis, or tendonitis.

## What is the cause?

Biceps tendon injuries can be caused by:

- Overuse of your tendon from a sport or work activity that involves frequently raising your arm over your head such as playing tennis, pitching, golfing, or doing carpentry
- A sudden activity that twists or tears your tendon such as lifting something very heavy or landing on your arm during a fall

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of a biceps tendon injury may be felt in the shoulder or the elbow. Symptoms may include:

- Pain when you move your arm and shoulder, especially when you move your arm over your shoulder
- Pain when you touch the front of your shoulder or when you do certain activities such as throwing
- Swelling and bruising on the top of your arm or around your elbow

- Trouble lifting or turning your arm, especially turning your palm up and down

If the tendon is completely torn, you may have felt a pop at the time of the injury and you may have a large bulge on your upper arm. You may not be able to raise or turn your arm or flex your elbow.

## How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will examine you and ask about your symptoms, activities, and medical history. Tests may include:

- X-rays
- MRI, which uses a strong magnetic field and radio waves to show detailed pictures of your arm
- Ultrasound, which uses sound waves to show pictures of the tendons
- CT Scan, which uses X-rays and a computer to show detailed pictures of the tendons

## How is it treated?

You will need to change or stop doing the activities that cause pain until the tendon has healed and is no longer painful.

Your healthcare provider may recommend stretching and strengthening exercises to help you heal. You may need physical therapy.

You may need a cast or a sling for several weeks to keep your arm from moving while it heals.

If the pain does not go away, your provider may give you a shot of a steroid medicine. If your tendon is torn, you may need surgery to repair the tendon.

The pain often gets better within a few weeks with self-care, but some injuries may take several months or longer to heal.

## How can I take care of myself?

To help relieve swelling and pain:

- Put an ice pack, gel pack, or package of frozen vegetables wrapped in a cloth on the injured area every 3 to 4 hours for up to 20 minutes at a time.
- Do ice massage. To do this, freeze water in a paper cup, then peel the top of the cup away to expose the ice. Hold the bottom of the cup and rub the ice over the painful area for 5 to 10 minutes. Do this several times a day while you have pain.
- Keep your arm up on pillows so that it is above the level of your heart when you sit or lie down.
- Take nonprescription pain medicine, such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, you should not take these medicines for more than 10 days.
  - Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, naproxen, and aspirin, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age.

- Acetaminophen may cause liver damage or other problems. Unless recommended by your provider, don't take more than 3000 milligrams (mg) in 24 hours. To make sure you don't take too much, check other medicines you take to see if they also contain acetaminophen. Ask your provider if you need to avoid drinking alcohol while taking this medicine.

Moist heat may help relax your muscles and make it easier to move your arm. Put moist heat on the injured area for 10 to 15 minutes at a time before you do warm-up and stretching exercises. Moist heat includes heat patches or moist heating pads that you can purchase at most drugstores, a wet washcloth or towel that has been heated in the dryer, or a hot shower. Don't use heat if you have swelling.

Follow your healthcare provider's instructions, including any exercises recommended by your provider. Ask your provider:

- How and when you will get your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- If there are activities you should avoid, including how much you can lift, and when you can return to normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup. Keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

## **How can I help prevent a biceps tendon injury?**

Warm-up exercises and stretching before activities may help prevent injuries. If your arm hurts after exercise, putting ice on it may help keep it from getting injured.

Follow safety rules and use any protective equipment recommended for your work or sport.

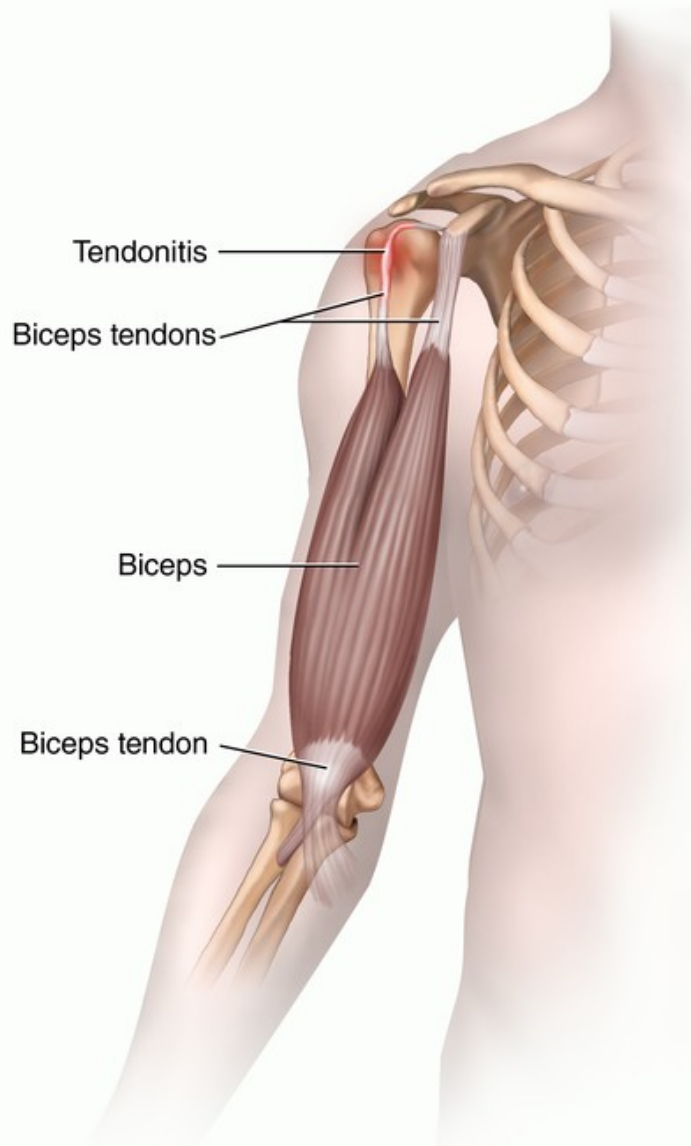
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