

# **PROXIMAL BICEPS TENDON RUPTURES**

## **What is the proximal biceps tendon?**

The biceps brachii is a muscle located on the front of the upper arm. The biceps has two main functions, flexing the elbow and rotating the forearm to turn your palm up. The word biceps come from the Latin word meaning “two heads”. Proximal is a term used to denote that something is closer to the shoulder girdle and trunk and distal indicates that something is farther away. The proximal, or, long head biceps tendon, anchors the origin of the biceps brachii muscle deep in the shoulder joint.

## **How is the tendon ruptured?**

Proximal biceps tendon ruptures can occur from an injury to the shoulder such as falling on an outstretched arm or a direct force to the upper arm. They may also occur from gradual wear and tear that progresses from tendonitis to a partial tear to a rupture.

## **How is a proximal biceps tendon rupture diagnosed?**

Clinically, a patient may present with pain at the upper arm and a visible deformity of the biceps brachii. The muscle will sag distally. This sometimes is referred to as a “Popeye sign” because of the bulging appearance (sag) of the muscle belly. It is important to consider injury to other structures in the shoulder, such as the rotator cuff tendons. These can be torn in combination with a proximal bicep tendon rupture. If a rotator cuff injury is suspected, an MRI should be ordered to assess it.

## **What is the treatment for a ruptured proximal biceps tendon?**

If only the proximal biceps tendon is ruptured, then immediate treatment should consist of ice applications and anti-inflammatory medications. A sling may be utilized for comfort. The front of the shoulder and upper arm may turn “black and blue”. Once the initial pain from the injury subsides, generally seven to ten days, physical therapy may be initiated. Physical therapy will consist of gradual restoration of range of motion, strength and function. Despite rupturing the tendon, you may notice only a slight weakness in elbow flexion and forearm supination (turning your palm up) after physical therapy is completed. The typical duration for physical therapy is approximately six weeks.

If the rotator cuff tendon(s) are ruptured in combination with the proximal biceps tendon, then the rotator cuff should be repaired as it normally would, but the proximal biceps tendon does not need surgical reattachment.