

Biceps Tendinopathy & Tendon Tear

What You Need to Know

What Is Biceps Tendinopathy?

The biceps muscle has two tendons attaching it to the shoulder (proximal tendons) and one attaching it to the forearm (distal tendon). Biceps tendinopathy at the shoulder refers to irritation, inflammation, or degeneration of the long head of the biceps tendon where it attaches at the top of the shoulder socket. A biceps tendon tear occurs when this tendon partially or completely ruptures — either at the shoulder or, less commonly, at the elbow.

What Does It Feel Like?

- A dull, aching pain at the front of the shoulder
- Tenderness when pressing along the front of the shoulder (bicipital groove)
- Pain with overhead activities, lifting, or carrying
- Pain when rotating the forearm (as if turning a doorknob)
- With a complete rupture: a sudden pop, significant bruising, and a visible "Popeye" bulge in the arm where the muscle has rolled down

What Causes It?

- Repetitive overhead activity or heavy lifting over time
- Associated with shoulder impingement — the biceps tendon often becomes involved together
- Sudden eccentric load — lifting something too heavy or catching a fall
- Age-related degeneration — tendons weaken and fray over decades

Do I Need Surgery for a Tear?

Most proximal biceps tears at the shoulder do not require surgery. The muscle still functions adequately, and PT restores strength. A distal biceps tear (at the elbow) more often requires surgical repair to preserve elbow flexion and forearm rotation strength, particularly in active individuals.

When Should I Be Concerned?

- A sudden pop in the shoulder or elbow followed by a visible deformity — seek evaluation
- Sudden severe weakness in elbow flexion or forearm rotation
- Rapidly spreading bruising after an injury

The Good News

Biceps tendinopathy resolves well with physical therapy in the vast majority of cases. Even many tendon tears — especially at the shoulder — recover excellent function without surgery. Treatment focuses on reducing inflammation, restoring shoulder mechanics, and building the strength of the surrounding muscles to offload the biceps tendon.

Biceps tendinopathy typically resolves significantly within **6 to 10 weeks** of targeted physical therapy.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

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