Elbow Stiffness – Rehabilitation & Turnbuckle Brace

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Principles
• Frequent range of motion
  o Exercise for a minimum of 20 minutes every 2 hours while awake
  o The more exercise the better
• Avoid lasting pain
  o It’s okay to feel some pulling and discomfort with the exercise. After exercises, you should have a ‘having-exercised type of feeling’, and not lasting pain.

Motion Exercises
• Flexion (bend) & extension (straight):
  o Support upper arm (humerus) on a high countertop and keep it flat. Use your own muscles to flex/extend the elbow, and then use the other hand to give a little extra push.
  o Push and hold (for about 10 to 20 seconds), release, then push and hold again in the same direction. Change directions (flexion/extension) and repeat.
  o If you have a sore shoulder, you can do the same exercises standing and stabilizing the upper arm flat against a wall.
• Forearm rotation. Supination (palm up) & Pronation (palm down)
  o Keep your elbow bent 90 degrees and held at your side.
  o Use your own muscles to turn your hand palm-up (supinate), and grasp the wrist on the stiff elbow side, and use your unaffected hand to twist a little further. Push and hold, release, push and hold again, and then change directions to palm down (pronation).

Turnbuckle brace
• Nighttime:
  o Work on direction most needed (usually extension/straightness)
  o Apply turnbuckle and increase pressure to feel tension and stretching
  o Be able to sleep 6 hours without waking up with elbow pain. If you wake up sooner with elbow pain, the brace was set a little too tight and back off on the pressure.
  o Typically use the brace at night for at least 3 months
• Daytime:
  o May be brace free for:
    ▪ Exercises (exercises are the number 1 priority)
    ▪ 1 hour off at meal times
  o Use brace in between exercises
    ▪ Most of the time, set to direction opposite to night-time use
    ▪ Depending on how the motion is coming along, you can alternate between flexion (bend) and extension (straight). Spend more time in the daytime with which ever motion is needed most.
    ▪ Goal is to achieve minimum motion from 30° to 130° (a perfectly straight elbow is at ‘zero degrees’).