



After Rotator Cuff Repair

Jack Goldstein, M.D.

After Shoulder Rotator Cuff Repair, your surgeon would like you to know what precautions you should take, and what you should expect. This information sheet has been written to be broad enough to cover several situations; however, details of each may differ depending upon your individual surgery.

Pain Medication: Rotator cuff repair may be performed arthroscopically or with open techniques. Arthroscopy is relatively non-invasive, so the discomfort you have after surgery may be less than if the same surgery was performed with an open incision. To aid in pain relief, the joint is filled with analgesic and narcotic, and a nerve block is often used to improve comfort. This may make your arm numb and weak for more than 12 hours. Pain is minimized when little pain present immediately after surgery. Patients usually take narcotics for the first week or two. After the first few days these should be used sparingly. This improves the effectiveness, and ensures that you will not become physically dependent. Usually, after the first week, little pain medicine is required except at night to aid with sleep. Sitting up at night, with pillows or blankets will help your comfort. Your physician will give you enough pain medicine to last through your first post-op visit. This is usually 7-10 days after surgery.

Wound Care: When arthroscopic reconstruction has been performed, only small puncture sites are present, and your dressing may be removed after one or two days, with Band-Aids reapplied. With open reconstruction, a small incision will be present with Steri-strips across the incision. Showering may occur on the fourth day after surgery; but if an open repair was performed, this should wait until the sutures are removed. Prior to suture removal, wash around the incision site. When you shower, do not scrub the surgical area. Let the water runoff, blot the skin dry, and reapply a dry sterile dressing. Do not soak in a bath, pool or the ocean until one week after your stitches are removed. When you come to the office, your sutures will be removed, Steri-strips will be maintained as reinforcement, and you can then treat the area without special consideration. Leave the strips in place until they come off on their own. This is a precaution against wound contamination from skin bacteria.

Physical Therapy: Early motion of the extremity is important for early return to normal function. In the shoulder, elevate the head of your bed for the first few weeks, and use a sling initially. Motion should be supervised by a Physical Therapist when capsular, or rotator cuff reconstruction has been performed. Please make arrangements so that therapy begins within days after surgery to minimize stiffness. Therapy should also be started at home starting with passive pendulum motion and an overhead pulley, using the normal arm to raise the operative arm above your head. Simple stretching can be performed at home without placing excessive stress on your rotator cuff repair. Arthroscopic and open rotator cuff repair are no different with return of function. With either method, your shoulder should be protected against overload until healing has occurred. The course of rehabilitation will depend on the rotator cuff size and tendon quality.

Contact: If you develop increasing pain, or fever above 101.5.

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400 Massasoit Ave, Suite 200 East Providence, RI 401-919-5222
www.sportsmedcenter.com

