

Guidance for Rotator Cuff repair Surgery

Pain:

A nerve block may be used before the operation, which means that immediately after the operation the shoulder and arm may feel numb. This may last a few hours. After this the shoulder may well be sore and you will be given painkillers to help this whilst in hospital.

The painkillers can be continued after you go home. Ice packs may also help reduce pain. Wrap frozen peas or crushed ice in a damp, cold cloth and place on the shoulder for up to 15 minutes.

Going Home:

If the operation is early in the day and the tear in the tendon is small, you may be able to go home on the same day of the operation. Otherwise, you will spend one night in hospital.

Wearing a Sling:

This is normally needed for 3 weeks being worn under your cloths to allow the repair time to heal. Occasionally, 6 weeks may be required in a sling with a large tendon tear. The sling will only be removed to do the exercises.

The Wound:

Your doctor will tell you if you have any sutures in your keyhole wounds, which may need to be removed. If there are no sutures, the wound may leak for 3 to 4 days. The wounds should be kept dry until healed. This usually takes 5 to 7 days.

Expected Progress:

When you come out the sling, your shoulder will be stiff. Physiotherapy will initially concentrate on regaining the movement, initially with help then using your own muscles. Strengthening exercises will start 3 months after the operation when the tendons are expected to have healed.

Pain will settle down over a period of 3 months after the operation. Movement will continue to improve for 6 months and depending on the size of the tendon tear, may not be complete. Strength will improve for up to 18 months but will never be completely normal.

Driving:

You will not be able to drive for 6 or even 8 weeks for larger tears.

Returning to work:

If you have a less physical job, you will be able to get back to work when you can drive or earlier if you do not have to drive. For a more physical job, you will off work for 3 months. Occasionally, return to a physical that was not possible to do before surgery, may not be possible if the tendon tear is large.

Leisure activities:

Return to sport will depend on the type of sport. Swimming breaststroke is allowed when the sling is off. Overhead sports and golf are allowed at 3 months and contact sports at 4 months.

Exercises:

Your physiotherapist will discuss your individual exercises with you before you leave hospital.

Complications:

Other than very rare anaesthetic complications, an infection may occur particularly if an open operation was required or if you have other medical conditions such as diabetes, which make you more liable to infection. There is a small risk of nerve injury during surgery.

There is a 1 in 10 chance that your shoulder problem will not improve after surgery. There is a chance ranging from 1 in 10 to 5 in 10 that you will develop a further tear in the tendons in the future, dependant on the size of the tear repaired. However, even after a further tear, the benefit of the surgery in terms of pain relief and to a lesser extent movement are not lost.

Occasionally, a tear in the tendon may be so large, it can not be repaired or can only be partially repaired. Again, in these situations, pain relief can be achieved but function may not be full.

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