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ROTATOR CUFF REPAIR SURGERY

The rotator cuff is a group of four tendons and related muscles that stabilize the shoulder joint and allow you to raise and rotate your arm. The shoulder is a ball-and-socket joint with three main bones: the upper arm bone (humerus), the collarbone (clavicle), and the shoulder blade (scapula). These bones are held together by muscles, tendons, ligaments, and the joint capsule. The rotator cuff helps keep the ball of the arm bone stay seated in the socket of the shoulder blade.

Surgery to repair a torn rotator cuff tendon usually involves:

Debridement: Removing loose fragments of tendon, bursa, and other debris from the space in the shoulder where the rotator cuff moves.

Subacromial Smoothing: Making more room for the rotator cuff tendon so it is not pinched or irritated. If needed, this includes shaving bone or removing bone spurs from the point of the shoulder blade.

Repair: Reattaching the torn rotator cuff to the top of the upper arm bone (humerus).

General anesthesia and a nerve block may be used for these types of surgical repairs.

Rotator cuff tears can usually be repaired via arthroscopic surgery, sometimes an open incision is necessary.

Why Surgery?

Surgery to repair a rotator cuff is done when:

- A rotator cuff tear is caused by a sudden injury. In these cases, it's best to do surgery soon after the injury.
- A complete rotator cuff tear causes severe shoulder weakness.
- Shoulder pain has failed to improve with 3 to 6 months of conservative nonsurgical treatment alone (such as physical therapy and cortisone injections).
- You need full shoulder strength and function for your job or activities, or you are active.
- You are in good enough physical condition to recover from surgery and will commit to completing a program of physical rehabilitation.

How Well It Works

Rotator cuff repair surgery for a tear from a sudden injury works best if it is done within a few weeks of the injury. Larger tears require a more complex surgery and longer recovery time.

Risks

In addition to the risks of surgery in general, such as problems related to anesthesia, complications of rotator cuff surgery may include:

- Infection of the incision or shoulder joint.
- Pain or stiffness that won't go away.
- The need for repeated surgery because tendons do not heal properly or tear again.
- Nerve or blood vessel damage (uncommon).
- Complex regional pain syndrome (rare).

What To Expect After Surgery

Discomfort after surgery may decrease with taking pain medicines prescribed by Dr. Seeds.

The arm will be protected in a sling for a defined period of time. Dr. Seeds will instruct you during your first post-operative visit when you can remove your arm from the sling.

Recovery/Physical Therapy

The time after surgery is crucial to a successful recovery. Formal physical therapy is usually started two weeks after surgery. Here is what to expect after surgery:

- Your first office visit will usually be scheduled a few days after surgery. Prior to this visit, **your arm should remain in the sling at ALL times.**
- During your first office visit, your dressing will be changed and the “dos and don’ts” of removing your arm from the sling for movement and showering will be explained.
- Two weeks after surgery, your sutures will be removed, allowing you to get the surgical area wet and formal physical therapy will be started. Therapy usually occurs two to three times per week. Use of the arm sling is continued during this time.
- Your next visit will be six weeks after your surgery. At your six week appointment, use of the arm sling will be discontinued. In addition, physical therapy will be advanced to start active exercises (you moving your arm yourself).
- Strengthening exercises, beginning with light weights and progressing to heavier weights, can start a few months after surgery.

Things To Consider

- Large tears or tears involving more than one rotator cuff tendon sometimes cannot be repaired. But, surgery can improve pain and function.
- Less active people (usually those older than 70) with confirmed rotator cuff tears that do not cause pain, significant weakness, or sleep problems can safely go without surgery unless symptoms get worse.
- Some people who do not have surgery to repair severe rotator cuff tears develop cuff tear arthropathy, a condition of progressive arthritis pain, and significant loss of strength, flexibility, and function.
- In some cases, arthroscopic debridement and smoothing adequately relieves pain and restores enough function to allow daily activities.

Videos

To watch any of our patient videos, type the link below in your browser’s navigation bar or go to youtube.com and enter the name of the video in the search bar.

Post-Operative Shoulder Care: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPhVpTimYZI>

How To Put On A Post-Operative Shoulder Sling: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QqfubOcm1o>

If you have questions, please call Katy or Melissa at 855-MBJ-BONE or send an email to:

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