

Rotator Cuff Repair: What to Expect at Home

Your Recovery

Rotator cuff repair surgery is done to fix a tear in the rotator cuff. It can also include cleaning the space between the rotator cuff tendons and the shoulder blade. This is called subacromial decompression.

You will feel tired for several days. Your shoulder will be swollen, and you may notice that your skin is a different color near the cut (incision). Your hand and arm may also be swollen. This is normal and will start to get better in a few days.

It will be several months before you have complete use of your shoulder and arm. Once you have healed from surgery, you will need to build your strength and the motion of your joint with rehabilitation (rehab) exercises. In time, your shoulder will likely be stronger, less painful, and more flexible than it was before the surgery.

This care sheet gives you a general idea about how long it will take for you to recover. But each person recovers at a different pace. Follow the steps below to get better as quickly as possible.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Rest when you feel tired. Getting enough sleep will help you recover. Do not lie flat or sleep on your side. Raise your upper body on two or three pillows, or sleep in a reclining chair.
- Try to walk each day. Start by walking a little more than you did the day before. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk. Walking boosts blood flow and helps prevent pneumonia and constipation.
- Your arm will be in an immobilizer or other device to prevent it from moving for 4 to 8 weeks.
 - Always use the immobilizer when you are walking or standing.
 - If you are sitting or lying down, you can loosen the immobilizer, but do not remove it. This lets your elbow straighten without moving the shoulder. You can also support your arm on a pillow.
 - Remove the immobilizer only to do prescribed exercises or to shower.
- You will not have complete use of your affected arm for 3 to 4 months after surgery.
 - You can use your affected arm for writing, eating, or drinking, but move it only at the elbow or wrist. Do not use it for anything else except prescribed exercises until the sling has been removed.

- When the sling has been removed, you can do activities that do not involve lifting, pushing, pulling, or carrying. You may not be able to do overhead lifting for 6 to 12 months.
- If you have a desk job, you will probably be able to return to work or your normal routine in 1 to 2 weeks. If you have a more active job, you may be away from work for 3 to 4 months or longer. If you work at a job that involves heavy manual labor, lifting your arms above your head, or the use of heavy tools, you may have to think about making changes to your job.

How will my pain be controlled after surgery?

Your doctor may prescribe you pain medicine if the pain is hard to tolerate. You might experience bruising, stiffness and swelling of your hand and arm, in addition to pain. These are normal symptoms and stem from the shoulder healing process.

Many types of pain medicine are available to reduce swelling and control your pain.

Local anesthetics: These numb the painful area.

Opioids: Only take these powerful drugs short-term, since they are highly addictive.

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs: These include Advil or ibuprofen.

Treating the pain with medicine can make you feel more comfortable, which will help your shoulder surgery recovery go more smoothly.

It's essential to always use opioids exactly as prescribed, since they can be habit-forming. Once your pain starts improving, you should stop taking the opioids. If you still require pain medication, switch to other types of pain relief.

Surgical Incision Care

Change your dressing as the doctor instructs until they remove your stitches. Typically, this occurs a week following surgery. After your doctor removes your stitches, they might allow you to rinse the wound. Don't soak the incision site in a bath or take long showers. Make sure you dry the wound thoroughly after your shower.

Sleeping After Shoulder Surgery

- It can be a challenge trying to find a comfortable sleep position after shoulder surgery. Here are some rotator cuff surgery recovery sleeping tips your doctor will likely have you follow:
- Sleep on the opposite side, since initially, you won't be able to put pressure or weight directly on the affected shoulder. You can also use pillows for propping yourself up into a more upright position.
- Lie flat to sleep, as your pain and discomfort begin to decline.

- Add some pillows behind your back to help keep you from rolling back on the affected shoulder. You can also use wedge-shaped pillows, or you can stuff something underneath your mattress to make it tilt slightly, which will make it harder for you to turn over.
- Switch sides with your partner to help keep you sleeping on your unaffected shoulder, depending on your sleeping habits and the side you usually sleep on.
- If you live alone, try putting your bed up against a wall to keep you from turning toward the wall side.
- Elevate your shoulder by placing pillows under it. Doing this will help with swelling and keep you from turning onto your shoulder.
- Keep your affected arm in a sling to help keep your shoulder protected and prevent unnecessary movement.

. Know Recovery Times Can Vary

Because people have different health conditions, full recovery time will be different for everybody.

You might not require a sling if you've had a minor repair, and your strength might come back after a short period of rehabilitation. In cases like these, you might be able to go back to work or school within a few days of your surgery.

More complicated procedures will take longer to recover. Complete recovery might take a few months with arthroscopic shoulder surgery. Although recovery can be a slow process, following your doctor's instructions and your rehabilitation plan is crucial for a