

R O T A T O R C U F F R E P A I R

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is a rotator cuff tear?

The rotator cuff is comprised of muscles and tendons that surround the shoulder. The rotator cuff secures the top of the upper arm bone (or humerus) into the shoulder joint. The rotator cuff is important for arm movement, especially for actions such as throwing a ball or reaching up over your head. If the muscles or tendons in the shoulder are torn, the injury is called a rotator cuff tear. A rotator cuff tear may result from a fall or injury or develop over time as a result of repetitive overhead movements.

What are the signs and symptoms of a rotator cuff tear?

The signs and symptoms of a rotator cuff tear include:

- Shoulder pain or tenderness, particularly with overhead activities.
- Shoulder pain at night that may prevent you from sleeping on the affected side.
- Shoulder weakness that limits motion or makes lifting the arm difficult.
- Catching, grating or cracking sounds when the arm is moved.

How is a rotator cuff tear treated?

The initial treatment for rotator cuff tear is generally non-surgical and can involve one or more of the following:

- Rest and avoiding overhead movements.
- Physical therapy or a prescribed exercise regimen to strengthen and stretch the muscles of the rotator cuff.
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications to control pain.

When non-surgical approaches are unsuccessful, there are several surgical options to repair rotator cuff tears. Your surgeon will select the approach that is appropriate given the size, depth, and location of the tear.

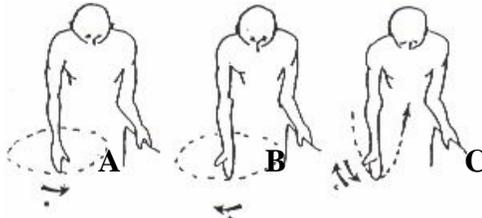
Surgical approaches include the following:

- **Arthroscopy:** Several small incisions are made and miniature instruments are used to remove bone spurs, inflammatory portions of muscle and to repair minor tears.
- **Mini-open repair:** A procedure that involves a small incision and arthroscopy to treat full-thickness tears.
- **Open surgery:** Includes a number of procedures used to correct more severe tears and to repair injured tendons. Open surgery may include a tissue transfer, a tendon graft or a joint replacement.

What do I need to do after surgery?

Careful attention to your surgeon's postoperative instructions will promote healing and prevent complications after rotator cuff repair.

- **Pain control:** Take pain medication as ordered to minimize pain after surgery. In addition, place an ice pack (or bag of frozen vegetables), covered with a towel on the affected shoulder for 15-20 minutes each hour. This will decrease postoperative swelling and reduce pain.
- **Dressing:** The surgical bandage will be removed the day after surgery and Band-Aids will be applied over each small incision. Once your incisions are covered with Band-Aids, you may shower.
- **Sling & Swathe:** The sling and swathe must be worn following surgery until you visit your surgeon in the office for your postoperative exam. This will protect your shoulder and keep the arm comfortable. If recommended by your surgeon, the sling and swathe can be removed to shower and to perform recommended exercises. For the first few weeks following surgery, the sling and swathe is especially important when riding in a car or when in crowded places to protect the shoulder from being banged or jolted.
- **Exercises:** Begin the "pendulum" exercises the day following your surgery or as recommended by your surgeon. Perform the exercise 3 times per day, 25 repetitions in each direction as shown below



Pendulum Exercises: *Bending over at the waist and balancing with the good arm, let the stiff side relax and swing with gravity: A. circle with the hand turned inward, B. circle in the opposite direction with the hand turned outward, C. swing forward (as when "bowling").*

What do I need to do for follow-up?

Call to schedule a follow-up appointment in your surgeon's office for approximately one week after surgery. Your stitches will be removed and physical therapy will be arranged at this time. Take your medications as prescribed (see discharge instruction form).

What do I need to report to my surgeon?

Although complications following rotator cuff repair are uncommon, you need to be aware of those signs and symptoms that warrant a call to your physician. Contact your orthopedic surgeon if you experience any of the following:

- Your incision becomes swollen, red or has new drainage.
- Your incision comes apart.
- Your bandage becomes soaked with blood or other drainage.
- Your temperature is over 101⁰ F.
- You have questions or concerns about your surgery or medication.

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education.

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