

Small-Medium Rotator Cuff Tear Surgery - Recovery Guide

Discharge

You may be discharged on the day of surgery, or spend a night in hospital.

Sling

The sling is to be worn for 4-6 weeks unless advised otherwise.

You may come out of the sling when sitting comfortably in a chair, using a computer, eating, and performing exercises.

Bandage / Dressings / Sutures

You will be discharged from hospital with a dressing covering your shoulder wound. Leave the dressing in place until your 2-3 week review and we will remove it. The dressings are water resistant. Showering is fine but please keep your dressings relatively dry until your post op review.

Swelling / Icing

Post-operative swelling of the shoulder is normal and should gradually decrease over the course of a few weeks. Swelling often occurs in the arm and hand due to immobilisation in a brace/sling. Regular icing is effective for managing both pain and swelling for up to 10 days. Apply ice to your shoulder 3-5 times a day for 20 minutes at a time. Elevation of the hand higher than elbow, and elbow higher than shoulder while resting will also help alleviate swelling.

If the swelling worsens, or if you notice redness around the wound or experience a fever, please contact our office immediately or see your local doctor. For after-hours concerns, you can also reach out to the hospital emergency department.

Pain Relief / Medications (*allergies permitting*)

Your anaesthetist will have prescribed a range of painkillers for you to go home with. You should take them as prescribed. In general you should take paracetamol regularly, followed by anti-inflammatories if prescribed and then strong painkillers (such as Palexia/ Tapentadol) for top-up pain relief. Cease these medications as soon as the pain allows.

Dr Robinson recommends taking Vitamin C 1000-1500 mg daily from 2 days prior to surgery until at least 3 weeks post the surgery.

Post-Operative Appointments

2-3 weeks: Your first post op clinic review.

A nurse will remove your dressing and review your wound.

3 months: Review to see how you are progressing.

Return to Work / Driving

A reasonable goal for returning to office work is within 2-4 weeks.

For more physically demanding jobs, the target is typically 2-4 months on limited duties.

Driving can usually be resumed around 8 weeks. It is important to note that you may not be covered by your car insurance if you are involved in a motor vehicle accident before 6 weeks.

Return to Activities guide

Running: 10 weeks

Swimming: Water walking 8 weeks, breast stroke 3-4 months, Freestyle 6 months

Tennis: 6 -9 months

Golf: 6 months

Gym based activities may commence at 4-6 months with modification.

Physical Therapy Guide

Physical therapy can be commenced the day after surgery. Let your activity be guided by your pain, do not continue any exercises that are painful. Please note these exercises are a guide only, and you may be directed to a more specific program by your physiotherapist.

0 - 3 weeks post operation

Continue with normal wrist movements and finger and thumb range of motion as tolerated. Include exercises for the elbow, wrist, and hand.

Wrist flexion and extension

Wrist bends improve flexibility and help break up scar tissue.

- Extend your arm with your wrist bent at a 90-degree angle.
- You may use your other hand to gently pull your wrist back by your fingers, holding the stretch for 10-30 seconds.

Repeat this exercise five times.



Passive elbow flexion ([preview here](#))

- Sit or stand comfortably with your arm straight by your side.
- Use your non operative arm to support and lift your non operative arm
- Slowly bend your arm up toward your shoulder, and then lower it back down by your side, using your non operative arm as support throughout

Repeat this exercise 10 times, 3 times a day.



Neck range of motion exercises ([preview here](#))

- Stand or sit comfortably in a chair.
- Move your head to look up and down, left to right, tilt your ear toward your left shoulder, then toward your right shoulder

Repeat this exercise 10 times, 3 times per day.



Shoulder Blade Exercises [\(preview here\)](#)

- Gently squeeze your shoulder blades together, hold for 5-10 seconds, then relax.
- Lift your shoulders towards your ears in a shrugging motion.
- Rotate your shoulders in circular movements, both forward and backward.

Repeat each exercise 10 times.



Shoulder hang [\(preview here\)](#)

- Use a chair or table for balance, leaning forward so your operative arm can hang toward the ground.
- Hold for 10-20 seconds, then resume standing tall.

Aim to repeat up to 10 times, 3 times a day.



3 - 6 weeks post operation

Continue previous exercises and progress to the following:

Shoulder Pendulum exercise ([preview here](#))

Bend forward at a 90° angle from the waist, using your uninjured hand on a table or chair for support.

- Gently rock your body in a circular motion, allowing your arm to move naturally.
- Move your arm clockwise in circles 10 times, then counterclockwise 10 times. Keep your arm relaxed throughout the exercise.
- The circular motion should be about 1 to 2 feet wide, with the movement coming from your shoulder joint.

Perform 3 sessions daily.



Supine passive elevation

lay on your back. hold the wrist of the operative arm, gently guide the operative arm up and over you head towards the pillow.

Progress to active elbow flexion and extension

Passive internal/external rotation ; with operative arm bent at 90 degrees, use unaffected arm to gently move operative arm in towards your stomach, and then out away from your body as tolerated.

6-12 weeks

Sling should be discarded. Continue previous exercises and add the following:

Active assisted shoulder flexion ([preview here](#))

Laying, sitting or standing, hold the hand of your operative arm in front of your chest

- With the support of the uninjured arm, raise both hands slowly towards the ceiling
- Then gently return hands to central position
- Once confident with the exercise, lower your hands behind your head for an extra stretch

Repeat this exercise 10 times, 3 times a day.

Stage 1:



Stage 2:



Stage 3:



Active assisted external rotation ([preview here](#))

- While holding a broomstick with both hands, keep your injured arm at your side with the elbow bent at 90 degrees.
- Rotate your shoulder outward using the injured limb until you reach your limit.
- Then, use your uninjured arm to gently assist in moving through a further range of motion.



Elbow flexion and extension ([preview here](#))

- Sit or stand comfortable with your arm straight by your side.
- Slowly bend your arm up toward your shoulder, and then lower it back down by your side.

Repeat this exercise 10 times, 3 times a day.



8-10 weeks post operation

Shoulder pulley exercises ([preview here](#))

Attach the pulley to the top of the door, or as directed by the pulley's instructions.

- Hold the pulley handles in both hands, with your thumbs up.
- Pull down with your unaffected arm to bring your affected arm forward and up.
- Hold the position for 5-10 seconds, then allow the affected arm to relax back to your side.

