

Exercises following rotator cuff repairs

Introduction

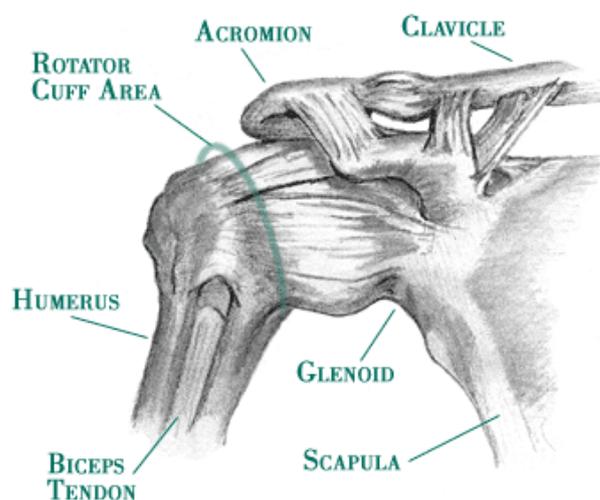
The rotator cuff consists of four muscles and their tendons, which surround the ball (humeral head) of the shoulder joint. The muscles fine-tune the movements of the shoulder and help keep the ball of the shoulder joint in its socket.

The tendons of the rotator cuff pass through a narrow space between the top of the arm bone and a prominent bone on the shoulder blade (the acromion). The cuff is very vulnerable to being pinched here when the arm is moved especially above the head. Over time this pinching can lead to tears. The chances of this happening increases with age.

When repeated tearing occurs, the fabric of the cuff becomes weakened and finally like the cloth at the knees of old trousers, splits. This leads to pain, which can be severe.

Weakness of the shoulder can occur and often clicking and crunching on movement.

Other forms of treatment such as injection and physiotherapy are available but sometimes it is necessary to repair the cuff. How well this does will depend upon the size of the tear. If we think about the trousers again, the bigger the split in the fabric, the more difficult is the repair and the more likely the repair is to tear. Your consultant will have discussed this with you.



The operation

This is carried out under a general anaesthetic (you are asleep). The surgery is usually performed through three incisions, one at the front, one at the side and the third at the back. The tendon is repaired by stitching it to the bone. The arm is then placed in a sling.

General guidelines

Pain

A nerve block may be used during the procedure, which means that immediately after the operation the shoulder and arm can feel numb for a few hours. The shoulder will be sore when this wears off and this may last for a few weeks. It is important that you continue to take the painkillers. Ice packs may also help reduce pain. Wrap frozen peas / crushed ice in a damp, cold towel and place on the shoulder for up to 10 minutes. Allow at least 20 minutes between each application of the ice pack.

Wearing a sling

You will return from theatre wearing a sling and body belt. The sling is worn for a minimum of three weeks up to a maximum of six weeks depending on the size of the repair. Initially you will only remove the sling for specific exercises. Your physiotherapist will advise you of these.

The wound

Arthroscopic (keyhole) repair: This keyhole operation is usually done through several 5mm puncture wounds. There will be no stitches only small sticking plaster strips over the wounds. These should be kept dry until healed. This is usually 5 to 7 days.

If your wounds change appearance, weeps fluid, pus or you feel unwell with a high temperature, contact your GP.

Posture

Before starting any activity / exercise it is important to position your shoulders correctly. This allows normal shoulder function. Gently move your shoulder blades down and in towards the spine but not in a braced back position.

Follow up appointments

You will be reviewed in a specialist physiotherapy led Shoulder Group within a week of your surgery. Further physiotherapy will be arranged at this point; when this commences depends on the size of the tear.

You will be reviewed in the Shoulder Clinic by your surgeon / specialist physiotherapist three months after your surgery.

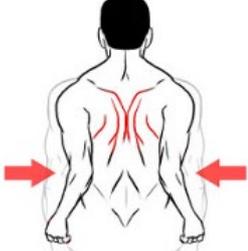
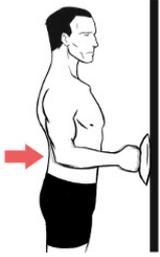
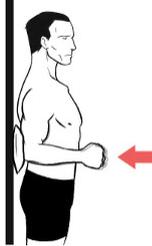
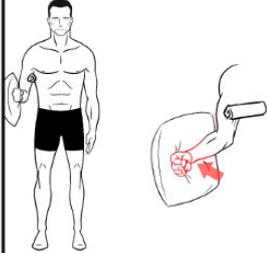
Progression

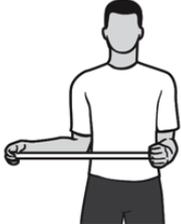
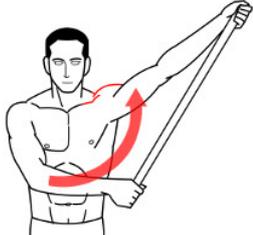
This depends on the size of the tear, the quality of the remaining tendon and the time you have to immobilise the shoulder in the sling.

At three months after your surgery your symptoms should be much better. It might take up to 6 months after your surgery to regain considerable strength in your shoulder and your symptoms will be approximately 80% better or more at this stage. By this stage you should have almost full range of movement although there will probably still be discomfort when moving your arm overhead.

Day 0-3 weeks

Your physiotherapist will teach you the following exercises.

<p>1. Keep your arm in the sling and move your hand up and down at the wrist.</p>	
<p>2. With your arm in the sling and the elbow bent at your side, turn the hand to face the ceiling and then the ground.</p>	
<p>3. With the arm in the sling regularly shrug shoulders up and down and circle forwards and back.</p>	
<p>4. With your arm out of the sling bend and straighten the elbow.</p>	
<p><u>Begin gentle cuff isometric* exercises as pain allows</u> <u>Do not force or push into pain:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arm at your side, elbow bent to 90 degrees, stand facing the wall. • Apply pressure forwards through the wall. <p><i>*Your muscle remains at the same length and your limbs and joints remain in the same position.</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arm at your side, elbow bent to 90 degrees, stand with your back to the wall. • Apply pressure back through the wall. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arm at your side, elbow bent to 90 degrees, stand next to the wall. • Apply pressure out through the wall as if turning the arm outwards. Using a pillow as shown in the picture may make the exercise more comfortable but is not essential. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arm at your side, elbow bent to 90 degrees, stand to the side of a door frame facing the wall. • Apply inward pressure against the door frame. 	
<p><u>From 3 weeks (small/moderate) or from 5-6 weeks (large/massive)</u></p>	
<p>5. Lying on your back, hold your operated arm with your good arm. Gently raise your arm above your head using your good arm to assist/support the operated arm. Initially do this exercise with a bent elbow and only go as far as comfortable.</p>	
<p>6. Sitting or standing, tuck your elbows into your side, elbows bent and hold a stick or broom between your hands. Use the good arm to assist the operated arm in a movement away from the body as comfort allows.</p>	
<p>7. Standing, holding a stick or broom, use the good arm to assist the operated arm in a movement away from the body and upwards.</p>	

Repeat each exercise 5-10 times every 2-3 hours or as pain allows. Continue the exercises until otherwise advised by your physiotherapist.

3-6 weeks

You can continue with all the above exercises but try and do them without using your other hand or a stick.

Further information

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Visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Images courtesy of <http://www.pt-helper.com>

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