



Rotator Cuff Rehabilitation Guidelines

Phase I: The first week after surgery.

Goals:

1. Control pain and swelling
2. Protect the rotator cuff repair
3. Protect wound healing
4. Begin early shoulder motion

Activities:

Immediately After Surgery

1. After surgery you will be taken to the recovery room where you will remain until comfortable. You will have a slings on your operated arm. An abduction pillow is needed to hold the arm up in the air away from the body.
2. You should get out of bed and move around as much you can.
3. When lying in bed, elevate the head of your bed and put a small pillow under your arm to hold it away from your body.
4. Apply ice to the operated shoulder as much as possible.
5. Move your fingers and hand to increase circulation.
6. The Novocaine in your shoulder wears off in about six hours. Ask for pain medication as needed.

The Next Day After Surgery

1. Remove the sling several times a day to gently move the arm in a pendulum motion: lean forward and passively swing the arm.

The Second Day After Surgery

1. The large dressing can be removed and a small dressing reapplied. Change every other day.

At Home

1. You can remove the bandages but leave the small pieces of tape (steri-strips) in place.
2. You may shower, but you may **not** get the incision wet. To wash under the operated arm, bend over at the waist and let the arm passively come away from the body. It is safe to wash under the arm in this position. This is the same position as the pendulum exercise.
3. Apply ice 20 minutes at a time as needed.
4. Remove the sling several times a day: move the elbow, wrist, and hand. Lean over and do pendulum exercises.
5. Do **NOT** lift your arm at the shoulder using your muscles.

Office Visit:

Please arrange to see a nurse in the office 7-10 days after surgery for wound check and instructions.

Phase II: 2 to 4 weeks after surgery.

Goals:

1. Protect the rotator cuff repair
2. Ensure wound healing
3. Prevent shoulder stiffness

Activities:

1. Sling

Use your sling except while doing your exercises. Remove the sling 4 to 5 times a day to do pendulum exercises.

2. Use of the Operated Arm

You may use your hand on the operated arm in front of your body but do **NOT** raise your arm or elbow away from your body. It is all right for you to flex your arm at the elbow.

3. Bathing and Showering

You may take a shower or bath and wash the incision area, but do not soak/submerge. To wash under the operated arm, bend over at the waist and let the arm passively come away from the body. It is safe to wash under the arm in this position. This is the same position as the pendulum exercise.

Exercise Program:

1. Pendulum Exercise

Bend over at the waist and let the arm hang down. Using your body to initiate movement, swing the arm gently forward and backward and in a circular motion. Do this for 3 to 5 minutes, 3 to 5 times per day.

2. Shoulder Shrug

Shrug shoulder upwards as illustrated in figure 2. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

3. Shoulder Blade Pinches

Pinch shoulder blades backward and together, as illustrated. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

4. Supine Passive Arm Elevation

Lie on your back. Hold the affected arm at the elbow with the opposite hand. Using the strength of the opposite arm, lift the affected arm upward, as if to bring the arm overhead, slowly lower the arm back to the bed. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

5. Supine External Rotation

Lie on your back. Keep the elbow of the affected arm against your side with the elbow bent at 90°. Using a cane or long stick in the opposite hand, push against the hand of the affected arm so that the affected arm rotates outward. Hold 10 seconds, relax, and repeat.

Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

Office Visit:

Please arrange to see Dr. Arnold in the office approximately 4 weeks following your first postoperative visit (5 weeks after surgery).

Phase III: 5 to 12 weeks after surgery.

Goals:

1. Protect the rotator cuff repair
2. Improve range of motion of the shoulder
3. Begin gentle strengthening

Activities:

1. Sling

Your sling is no longer necessary after week 6 unless Dr. Arnold instructs you to continue using it.

2. Use of the Operated Arm

You should continue to avoid lifting your arm away from your body, since this is the action of the tendon that was repaired. You can lift your arm forward in front of your body but not to the side. You may raise your arm to the side if you use the good arm to assist the operated arm. At 8 weeks you may begin active range of motion. Progress to gentle strengthening at 10 weeks.

3. Bathing and Showering

Continue to follow the instructions from phase I and the instructions above.

Exercise Program:

Exercises from earlier should continue once a day. The following exercises should be added and done twice a day:

1. Supine External Rotation With Abduction

Lie on your back. Place your hands behind your head as shown in illustration 1a. Slowly lower the elbows to stretch the shoulder toward the illustration 1b. Hold for 10 seconds then return to starting position. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

2. Supine Cross-Chest Stretch

Lying on your back, hold the elbow of the operated arm with the opposite hand. Gently stretch the elbow toward the opposite shoulder. Hold for 10 seconds. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

3. Standing External Rotation

Stand with the operated shoulder toward a door as illustrated. While keeping the operated arm firm against your side and the elbow at a right (90°) angle, rotate your body away from the door to produce outward rotation at the shoulder. Hold 10 seconds. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

4. Supine Passive Arm Elevation

Continue this exercise from phase II, stretching the arm overhead. Hold for 10 seconds. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

5. Behind-the-Back Internal Rotation

Sitting in a chair or standing, place the hand of the operated arm behind your back at the waistline. Use your opposite hand to pull on a towel, as illustrated, to help the other hand higher toward the shoulder blade. Hold 10 seconds, relax, and repeat. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

6. Side-Lying External Rotation

Lying on the non-operated side, bend your elbow to a 90° angle and keep the operated arm firmly against your side with your hand resting on your abdomen. By rotation at the shoulder, raise your hand upward, toward the ceiling through a comfortable range of motion. Hold this position for 1 to 2 seconds, then slowly lower the hand. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

7. Prone or Bent-Over Horizontal Arm Raise

Lie face down on your bed with the operated arm hanging freely off of the side (or bend over at the waist as if doing pendulum exercises). Rotate your hand so that the thumb faces away from you. Slowly raise your arm away from your body through a pain-free range of motion. Hold that position for 1 to 2 seconds and slowly lower. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times a day.

Office Visit:

Please arrange an appointment to see Dr. Arnold in 6 to 8 weeks.

Phase IV: 12 to 24 weeks after surgery.

Goals:

1. Protect the rotator cuff repair
2. Regain full range of motion
3. Continue gentle strengthening

Activities:

1. Sling

The sling is now discontinued in most cases.

2. Use of the Operated Arm

You may now use the arm for normal daily activities involved with dressing, bathing, and self-care. You may raise the arm away from the body; however, you should not raise the arm when carrying objects greater than one pound. Any forceful pushing or pulling activities could disrupt the healing of your surgical repair.

Exercise Program:

Exercises from phases one and two can continue one time a day. The following exercises should be done one or two times a day:

1. Theraband Exercises

Refer to the instruction sheet of rotator cuff exercises. These exercises should be done slowly for 20 to 30 repetitions per session. They should be done through a pain-free range of motion. Yellow band is light resistance, red band is medium resistance, and blue band is heavy resistance. Start with yellow and progress as advised by Dr. Arnold.

2. Corner Stretch

Standing facing a corner, position the arm as illustrated with the elbows at shoulder level. Lean your body gently forward toward the corner until a stretch is felt. Hold 10 seconds, relax, and repeat 10 times.

3. Wall Climb

Stand facing a wall, place the fingers of the affected arm on the wall. Using the fingers as "feet", climb the hand and arm upward. As you are able to stretch the hand and arm higher, you should move your body closer to the wall. Hold 10 seconds, lower the arm by pressing the hand into the wall and letting it slide slowly down. Do this 10 times.

4. Standing Forward Flexion

Stand facing a mirror with the hands rotated so that the thumbs face forward. Raise the arm upward keeping the elbow straight. Try to raise the arm by hinging at the shoulder as opposed to raising the arm with the shoulder blade. Do 10 repetitions to 90°. If you can do this without hiking the shoulder blade, do 10 repetitions fully overhead.

5. Side-Lying External Rotation

Continue this exercise from phase I using a one or two pound weight. Do 10 repetitions.

6. Prone or Bent-Over Horizontal Arm Raise

Continue this exercises from phase I using a one or two pound weight. Do 10 repetitions.

Office Visit:

Please arrange an appointment with Dr. Arnold in 3 months (6 months post-surgery).

Rotator Cuff Strengthening Exercises

1. Internal Rotation

Using theraband, keep the elbow at your side and the forearm at a right (90°) angle to the elbow. Rotate the arm inward across the body. Slowly return to the starting position.

Do 20 repetitions, one to two times a day.

2. External Rotation

Using theraband, keep the elbow against your side and the forearm at a right angle to the body starting with the forearm against your abdomen, rotate the arm outward. Slowly return to the starting position.

Do 20 repetitions one to two times a day.

3. Adduction

Using theraband, starting with the elbow straight and the arm 45° away from the body at the side, pull the arm inward toward the front of your thigh. Slowly return to the starting position.

Do 20 repetitions one to two times a day.

4. Abduction

Using theraband, starting with the elbow straight and the hand in front of your thigh, pull the arm outward to the side to a 45° angle. Slowly return to the starting position.

Do 20 repetitions one to two times a day.

5. Shoulder Shrug

Stand on the theraband with your feet at shoulder width apart and look straight ahead. With the knees slightly flexed and your arms straight down at the sides (palms in), slowly raise the shoulders in a shrug (towards the ears) and then down to the original position. This movement is completed while keeping constant tension on the cord.

Do 20 repetitions one to two times a day.

6. Seated Row

Attach the theraband in a doorjamb just above the lowest hung. Starting with the arm held straight in front of your chest, pull the theraband all the way toward the chest. Pull the cord so that your elbows are drawn along the side of the body until the hands touch your side. Return slowly to the start position.

Do 20 repetitions one to two times a day.