

Matt M. Diesselhorst, M.D.

Shoulder: Rotator Cuff Repair

Full Return Goal: 4-6 months

Post Op-6 weeks

Beginning on the second day after surgery, the sling is removed three times per day for 15 to 20 minutes for gentle elbow, forearm, wrist, and digital range of motion with the arm kept at the side. Pendulum exercises are also begun on the second day after surgery. Patients are instructed not to lift the arm actively away from the body and are to remain non-weight lifting to the operative arm.

The patient may shower after the dressings are removed (48-72 hours). A cold-flow cuff system (or ice) is used for at least 1 week four times per day. A sling is worn at all times, even during sleep, and is removed only for hygiene and to perform prescribed exercises.

6 weeks-3 months

Formal physical therapy is prescribed. Active-assisted and active range of motion is begun. This includes pulleys, wand, and supine gravity-assisted exercises. Active range of motion is still avoided in positions of impingement. At 10 to 12 weeks after surgery, all motion is allowed, including internal rotation behind the back. The scapular stabilizers are isolated and strengthened. Passive range of motion and terminal capsular stretching of the shoulder is progressed gradually.

With improvement in range of motion, the patient may begin weaning from the use of the sling, with a goal of discontinuation at the time of the 3 month post op visit. The arm is to remain on a 5lb weight restriction during this time.

3-6 months

Formal lifting restrictions are slowly discontinued. Rotator cuff and shoulder strengthening is begun. The sling is discontinued. A home program for rotator cuff and scapular stabilizer strengthening is provided. The goal is to equalize active and passive range of motion and gradually progress into regular work and recreational activities as rotator cuff strength and endurance improves.

Full return to activity is allowed once full range of motion and strength are evident.