

Physical Therapy Protocol Rotator Cuff Repair: Small and Medium Tears

Patient Name: _____ Date: _____

Diagnosis: _____

Surgery: _____ Surgery Date: _____

If Subscapularis repair: Shoulder external rotation in scapular plane limited to 30° x 6 weeks
No shoulder external rotation at 90° abduction x6 weeks
No subscapularis/Internal Rotation strengthening x 9 weeks

Phase I - Protective Phase (Weeks 0 - 6)

Goals:

- Protect integrity of repair.
- Gradual increase in PROM
- Gradual increase in shoulder strength
- Decrease pain and inflammation.

Precautions:

- Wear brace/sling at all times except when performing prescribed exercises + hygiene.
- No lifting of objects at all.
- No excessive shoulder extension or behind back motions.
- No sudden movements or stretching.
- No supporting of body weight or pushing up from sitting using operative arm.

Weeks 0 - 2:

- Sling/swathe for 6 weeks with the abduction pillow.
- Perform elbow/hand/wrist ROM exercises.
- NO PASSIVE ROM (PROM) OF SHOULDER X 2 WEEKS except pendulums.
- NO STRENGTHENING at all.
- Pain control modalities

Weeks 3 - 4:

- Start PROM to tolerance
 - Flexion with goal to 90 degrees, but may be limited due to pain
 - ER/IR in scapular plane
- Encourage safe home exercise program

Weeks 5 - 6:

- Continue PROM and GENTLE stretching with goal of full PROM if pain allows.
 - Flexion to 145°
 - ER/IR to 45° in scapular plane
- AAROM (start around Week 6 if can tolerate):
 - Flexion to 120°
 - ER/IR to tolerance in scapular plane.
 - ER/IR to 30° at 90° abduction.
- Encourage safe home exercise program.

Phase II - Intermediate Phase (Weeks 7 - 12)

Goals:

- Full, nonpainful Active and Passive ROM by 12 weeks.
- Gradual improvement in strength and power
- Gradual return to light functional activities
- Encourage safe home exercise program

Weeks 7 - 10:

- Discontinue brace or sling
- Maintain full PROM and progress to full AAROM.
- AAROM:
 - Flexion to tolerance.
 - ER/IR to tolerance in scapular plane.
 - ER/IR to tolerance at 90° abduction.
- AROM:
 - Flexion to 90°.
- Strengthening (Start at week 7):
 - Tubing ER @ 0° abduction.
 - Isotonics (light):
 - Prone rows to neutral arm position.
 - Prone horizontal abduction.
 - Bicep curls (1 pound weight maximum).
- Strengthening (start at week 8-9):
 - Rhythmic Stabilization drills.
 - Flexion/Extension at 90-100° of flexion in supine.
 - ER/IR in scapular plane
 - Sub-maximal/pain-free isometrics (all with bent elbow):
 - Flexion/bicep
 - Abduction
 - ER/IR
 - Extension

Weeks 10 -12:

- Maintain full AAROM and progress to full AROM.
- Strengthening:
 - Continue/progress rhythmic stabilization drills.
 - Continue tubing ER at 0° abduction working on endurance.
 - Tubing scapular strengthening to neutral working on endurance.
 - Isotonics (gradually progress resistance):
 - Flexion to 90° (no resistance until AROM is without hiking).
 - ER/IR in side lying.
 - Prone rows.
 - Prone horizontal abduction.
 - Biceps/triceps.

Phase III - Advanced Strengthening Phase (13 - 20 Weeks)

Goals:

- Maintain full, non-painful ROM.
- Improve strength of general shoulder/periscapular musculature.
- Improve neuromuscular control.
- Gradual return to all functional activities.

Weeks 13-16:

- Maintain full PROM/AAROM/AROM
- Perform self-capsular stretches if motion is tight.
- Encourage home exercise program
- Strengthening:
 - Continue isotonic/tubing and stabilization strengthening
 - Closed chain stabilization drills

Weeks 16 - 20:

- Advanced Strengthening program (at 16 weeks or earlier if tolerated): Continue isotonic/tubing and stabilization strengthening.
 - High-speed isokinetics for ER/IR in neutral (16 weeks).
 - Begin general shoulder strengthening with precautions (Gradual as tolerated):
 - Latissimus pulls with narrow grip and arms in front of body.
 - Chest press with light dumbbells keeping elbows anterior to shoulder.
 - Machine rows.
 - Military press with light dumbbells and arms in front only.
- Plyometric program (2 handed → 1 handed) at 16 weeks if tolerated

Phase IV -Return to Activity Phase (Weeks 21 - 26 and beyond)

Goals:

- Maintain shoulder ROM, strength and neuromuscular control.
- Gradual return to recreational sport activities.
- Gradual return to strenuous occupational activities.

Weeks 21 - 24:

- Continue flexibility, strength, stabilization and plyometric exercises.
- Isokinetic strength test for ER/IR in neutral at 180°/ sec and 300°/sec.
- Initiate interval sport program if appropriate.

Weeks 24 - 28:

- Continue flexibility, strength, stabilization and plyometric exercises.
- Continue with interval sport program and progress to return to sport when released.