

Arthroscopic Rotator Cuff Repair

What is the Rotator Cuff?

The rotator cuff is made up of four muscles and their tendons (Supraspinatus, Infraspinatus, Subscapularis & Teres Minor) that surround the shoulder joint. When you raise your arm the rotator cuff holds the ball (humeral head) of the shoulder within the socket (glenoid).

How do you repair the rotator cuff?

The rotator cuff will be repaired by making small incisions around the shoulder and by use of an arthroscope (camera) to see all the structures of the joint. Special instruments allow your surgeon to sew the rotator cuff back to the correct (anatomic) position.

What are some of the risks of surgery?

Any surgery carries a potential risk of infection, bleeding and nerve damage at the site of surgery. For a rotator cuff repair there is also a risk that the tendon will not heal properly, the tendon will re-tear or the shoulder will get stiff after surgery. If these problems are encountered, a second operation may be necessary. The risks associated with anesthesia will be discussed with you by the anesthesiologist on the day of surgery.

Length of Stay

This is same day surgery. You will need to have someone who can take you home.

Anesthesia

Patients usually have two types of anesthesia for this surgery. The first is general anesthesia, which means you are asleep. The second type of anesthesia is a nerve block. Your arm will be numb and will feel very strange. The nerve block will last about 12-24 hours. The ultimate choice of anesthesia technique is up to you and your anesthesiologist.

Incision

You will have 3-5 small incisions around your shoulder. They will only be about 1 cm long.

Pain

Rotator cuff repairs are initially very uncomfortable. You will have pain medication prescribed for you prior to discharge. After the nerve block wears off you will have discomfort. Most of the pain is related to your very swollen shoulder. That swelling will resolve in 24-48 hours.

Sling

Your arm will be placed in a pillow sling prior to leaving the operating room. You are to remain in your pillow sling 24 hours a day. This includes sleeping in your sling. For the four weeks that you are in your sling, **you are not permitted to drive**. It will help you to wear a button-down shirt while using the sling.

Dressings

You will go home with dressings that may be removed 3 days after your surgery. There will be small black sutures (stitches) that will be taken out at your first postoperative appointment approximately 2 weeks after your surgery.

Physical Therapy

For the first two to three months of recovery you will do very gentle stretching at home. The next three months you will continue to do your home exercises and you may also attend formal physical therapy.

Restrictions

Recovery from rotator cuff repair surgery is six months. During that time you will have restrictions on the use of your operative arm.

Day of surgery to Week 4: remain in sling, no use of arm, out of work, no driving

Months 1-3: opposite hand work only

Months 3-4.5: no lifting and carrying anything greater than 10 lbs and only occasional over shoulder reaching

Months 4.5-6: no lifting and carrying anything greater than 20 lbs