

Total Shoulder Arthroplasty

What is a Total Shoulder Arthroplasty?

A total shoulder arthroplasty (shoulder replacement) is a surgical procedure in which parts of an arthritic joint are replaced with a prosthesis or artificial parts. The surface of the ball (humeral head) is resurfaced with metal and the socket (glenoid) is resurfaced with plastic. This artificial joint is designed to move like a normal, healthy joint.

How do you replace the shoulder?

The prosthesis will be placed through an incision down the front of the shoulder. The ball component is usually pressed to fit into place while the socket will be cemented.

Length of Stay

You will spend 1-2 nights in the hospital after this surgery. You will need to have someone to drive you home after you have been discharged.

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. Sometimes a nerve catheter is placed which can numb your arm up to 3 days after surgery. The anesthesiologist will speak to you on the day of surgery. The ultimate choice of anesthesia technique is up to you and your anesthesiologist.

Incision

You will have an incision down the front of your shoulder. After the incision has healed, it is usually very thin and not very noticeable.

Pain

After the nerve block wears off you will have discomfort in the shoulder. You will have pain medication prescribed for you prior to discharge. Most patients say that their arthritis pain was worse than their surgical pain.

Sling

Your arm will be placed in a pillow sling prior to leaving the operating room. You will be in the sling for 4 weeks after surgery.

Dressings

You will go home with dressings that may be removed 3 days after your surgery. There will be steri-strips over the incisions. The steri-strips are to remain in place until they fall off on their own. Most patients will have dissolvable stitches under the skin. The incision should be kept dry for 5 days after surgery.

Physical Therapy

Before leaving the hospital, you may be given a home exercise program. For the three months of recovery you will do these very gentle stretches at home. Physical therapy can be helpful to regain your shoulder strength. The length of time needed for physical therapy is different for every patient.

Driving

You may drive when you feel that you can properly control a car and you are **NOT** taking narcotic pain medication. This typically occurs at 6 weeks after surgery.

Restrictions

Recovery from total shoulder replacement is three months. During that time, you will have restrictions on the use of your operative arm. You will have the following restrictions for the first 6 weeks: no active reaching and lifting, no closing doors, no reaching behind your back, and no repetitive movements.