



Excellence in Research and Education

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ROTATOR CUFF SURGERY

Introduction

The following information is provided to help you progress smoothly through your rotator cuff operation. Use this handout along with the pre-operative instruction sheet that will help you schedule your surgery, doctor visits, and physical therapy.

Before surgery

You are required to undergo a general medical evaluation prior to surgery. If you have any serious pre-existing medical condition(s), you may need to see your doctor(s) before going ahead with surgery.

As well, it is preferred that you meet with your physical therapist prior to your surgery. They will provide you with simple instructions for after surgery, as well as arrange your post-operative therapy sessions.

Anesthesia

You will meet the anesthesiologist on the day of your surgery. The specifics of the anesthesia used for your surgery will be discussed with you at that time. Typically, the operation is performed under a regional anesthetic (nerve block) that will numb the shoulder region. The anesthesiologist will also provide medication to make you comfortable during the procedure. The nerve block also provides pain relief after the procedure.

Surgery

You may be undergoing either an arthroscopic or open rotator cuff repair, or a combination of the two. As a result, your surgery may either be done as an outpatient (you go home the same day), or you may stay 1-2 nights in the hospital. This will be discussed with you ahead of time.

Arthroscopic surgery is done through several (3-5) small incisions around the shoulder. Open surgery is done through a single incision (approximately 2-3 inches) over the top of the shoulder. The surgery itself will last 1-3 hours depending on the size of the rotator cuff tear and the technique used.

Complications are **unusual** with rotator cuff surgery, but can and occasionally do occur. Potential complications include bleeding, infection, side effects or complications from anesthesia, nerve injury or muscle weakness, stiffness, persistent pain, and failure of the repair.

After surgery

You will be given a post-operative instruction sheet on the day of your surgery. This will give you specific information regarding the care of your incisions and the use of pain medication. Please refer to that sheet after your surgery.

You are required to wear a sling for protection for 4-6 weeks following your operation. Your surgeon will instruct you when you can quit using the sling.

Your physical therapy begins 2-4 days after surgery. You will be given a therapy referral form on the day of your surgery. Please give this to your therapist at your first visit after surgery. It provides the therapist with specific instructions on rehabilitating your shoulder. Typically, you attend physical therapy sessions 1-2 days per week for 6-12 weeks following surgery. This is adjusted according to your progress, and will be decided by you, the surgeon, and the therapist.

You will return to see the surgeon at one week, 6 weeks, 3 months, 6 months, and one year following surgery. The purpose of these visits is to monitor your progress, and ensure that you are making the smoothest and best possible recovery. It is important that you schedule and maintain these regular visits.

Activity

While wearing your sling, you will be allowed to perform certain table-top and hygiene activities once you are comfortable. However, you are not to elevate or initiate movement with your shoulder without assistance until cleared by your surgeon and therapist. People who have sedentary-type jobs (desk or computer work) are usually able to return in 1-2 weeks. Those who perform manual labor or jobs that involve heavier use of the shoulder will be required to switch to "light duty", or avoid work altogether for anywhere from 4 weeks to 3 months. (Note: these times are estimates; you may recover at a slower or faster rate.)

Discomfort is not unusual as you recover after surgery. In many instances, this persists to some degree for 3-4 months following surgery. Any problems that continue beyond that point will be investigated accordingly.

Total recovery time following surgery is variable and depends on many factors. Most people return to full, unrestricted use of the shoulder in 3-6 months after surgery. However, this depends greatly on the type of activity. Lighter activities recover more quickly; more strenuous activities take longer to return. In some situations, permanent limitations are recommended to prevent re-injury.

Questions

If you have any questions either before or after your surgery, do not hesitate to contact Dr. Lervick's office at **952-456-7111**.