



Texas Orthopedics,
Sports & Rehabilitation Associates
www.txortho.com

Rotator Cuff Surgery: Post Op Instructions

After surgery you'll have several instructions. These instructions will be given to you in the office before surgery and reinforced by the nurse after surgery in the recovery area.

Post operative appointment: Make sure you remember the date/time of this appointment and if you don't have one scheduled, you should do this right away. You can dial 512-439-1001 to make an appointment. Your incision will be checked and your stitches removed. We'll also review what I found in surgery and evaluate your progress. If there are any non-urgent questions you think of during the several days after your surgery, write them down and ask them at this time.

Prescriptions: These should have been given to you or called in to your pharmacy at the time of your pre-op visit. Make sure you have picked these up before surgery so you don't have to wait to get them after you've had your surgery.

I usually prescribe a narcotic pain pill, but some patients have problems with nausea after surgery and if you are one of these, please be sure to ask us to give you a prescription for an anti-emetic so you don't get caught without them.

Nerve Block: You have probably had a nerve block which will give you pain relief for several hours after you get home. Eventually the block will wear off and you may begin to experience more pain. Be sure to take your pain pills when you get home from the surgery center. Don't wait until you begin to experience the pain. It will take time for the medication's effects to kick in and you might suffer for a little while.

Abduction Pillow: I put most of my patients with rotator cuff repairs in an abduction pillow. It's inconvenient and frankly I don't think too many surgeons use them anymore. But I do and to me, the use of this brace makes a lot of sense. It takes the tension off my repair and also elevates your arm and later on, it's easier to raise your arm from 45 degrees to 90 degrees than from your side (where it would be if you were in just a sling) to 90 degrees. You should keep the pillow on pretty much all the time. However, keep in mind that I did your repair with your arm at your side, so if you go stark-raving mad in the pillow, you can take it off. You can also put it on regular pillows or the arm of a couch. When you get in the shower you can just let your arm hang down at your side or in front of you, like when you do the pendulum exercise. That way you can clean under your arm. You'll stop using the abduction pillow 3 weeks after surgery.

Sling: On occasion, for very small tear repairs or for people who can't tolerate the pillow, I'll put you in a sling. The same rules for 3 weeks of passive motion apply. Then you can stop using any kind of support at all. Some people prefer to use a sling for a little while longer, and that's fine. You can also use a sling for a short while after you stop the abduction pillow.

Austin: Northwest
439-1000

Austin: Central
439-1002

Cedar Park
439-1009

Round Rock
439-1004

Westlake
439-1005

Marble Falls
877-966-7846

Exercise (the first 3 weeks after surgery): In most cases, after a rotator cuff repair, I encourage my patients to begin moving their shoulder the next day. It's a little hard to move it while the nerve block is working. Exercising several times every day is important to your overall recovery. Don't wait for physical therapy or for this motion to just happen on its own. For the first 3 weeks after surgery I will want you to do ONLY passive range of motion. That means you let gravity or some external force exercise your shoulder. If you raise your arm under your own power, you are using my sutures to move the muscle. This will put too much pressure on the repair and could weaken it.

- **Pendulum exercise:** Bend over at your waist as if you were going to pick something off the floor. Allow your arm to hang straight down toward the floor. Then start making circles with your arm, as if you were trying to draw circles on the floor with your finger. Of course you don't actually touch the floor with your finger, unless you want to start seeing me for your back. As you are able, start making the circles bigger and bigger each day. You can make them clockwise or counter-clockwise. Do this several times a day.
- **Wall walking:** Face a wall and put your fingertips on the wall. Begin using your fingers to *pull* your arm up the wall. Your fingers will actually assist your shoulder. Try to do this several times each day and get higher and higher on the wall each time. You can even put a mark on the wall, like your folks did when they measured your height as you grew. Don't mark the wall anywhere that will get you in trouble though. You can do this exercise with your hands in front of you for flexion, or with your hand to the side for abduction.

Exercise (after 3 weeks): Now you can start active range of motion. This is when you start using your own muscles to raise your arm. You should still continue to do your pendulum and wall walking exercises until you are able to use your own muscles to raise your arm on your own. I don't allow my patients to lift anything heavier than about 2 lbs. over the weight of their own arm for the first 6 months after surgery. These repairs are very delicate. The rotator cuff tendon takes a long time to heal and early stress to the repair can weaken it and make you more susceptible to another tear.

Physical Therapy: I recommend P.T. following a rotator cuff repair. Many patients go into this operation already having lost range of motion. After the surgery this can worsen because of the pain, post operative weakening and scar tissue formation.

Activity: After surgery on your shoulder it is important to rest. Until I see you back in the office for your first post op visit, I would like you to take it easy. Don't go shopping, and don't choose this time to clean house or mow the lawn. Really, it's amazing how many people do this.

Icing: Please see my specific instructions on shoulder surgery icing.

Dressing Changes: Please see my specific instructions for shoulder surgery dressing changes.

Returning to Work: Please see those specific instructions too.