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## Arthroscopic Rotator Cuff Repair Protocol Medium to Large Tear Size

This protocol was developed to provide the rehabilitation professional with a guideline of postoperative rehabilitation course for a patient who has undergone an arthroscopic *medium to large* size rotator cuff tear repair. It should be stressed that this is only a protocol and should not be a substitute for clinical decision making regarding a patient's progression. Actual progression should be individualized based upon your patient's physical examination, individual progress and the presence of any postoperative complications.

The rate limiting factor in arthroscopic rotator cuff repair is the biologic healing of the cuff tendon to the humerus, which is thought to be a minimum of 8-12 weeks.

Progression of AROM against gravity and duration of sling use is predicated both on the size of tear and quality of tissue and should be guided by referring physician. Refer to initial therapy referral for any specific instructions.

### Phase I: Immediate Post Surgical Phase (Weeks 0-6)

#### Goals

- Maintain/protect integrity of repair
- Gradually increase PROM
- Diminish pain and inflammation
- Prevent muscular inhibition
- Independence in modified ADLs

#### Precautions

- No active range of motion (AROM) of shoulder
- No lifting of objects, reaching behind back, excessive stretching or sudden movements
- Maintain arm in brace, sling – remove only for exercise
- Sling use for 6 weeks – medium to large tear size
- No support of body weight by hands
- Keep incisions clean and dry

#### Day 1 to 6

- Use of Abduction brace/sling (during sleep also) – remove only for exercise
- Passive pendulum exercises (3x/day minimum)
- Finger, wrist, and elbow AROM (3x/day minimum)
- Gripping exercises (putty, handball)
- Cervical spine AROM
- Passive shoulder (PROM) done supine for more patient relaxation
  - Flexion to 110°
  - ER/IR in scapular plane < 30°
- Educate patient on posture, joint protection, importance of brace/sling, pain medication use early, hygiene
- Cryotherapy for pain and inflammation
  - Day 1-3: as much as possible (20 min/hour)
  - Day 4-7: post activity, or as needed for pain

#### Days 7-42

- Continue use of abduction sling/brace until the end of week 6.
- Pendulum exercises
- Begin PROM to tolerance (supine, and pain-free)
- May use heat prior to ROM
  - Flexion to tolerance

ER in scapular plane  $\geq 30^\circ$   
IR in scapular plane to body/chest  
Gentle scapular plane abduction: begin  $0-30^\circ$  and progress to  $0-90^\circ$  by end of week 7.  
Continue elbow, hand, forearm, wrist and finger AROM  
Begin resisted isometrics/isotonics for elbow, hand, forearm, wrist and fingers  
Begin scapula muscle isometrics/sets, AROM  
Cryotherapy as needed for pain control and inflammation  
May begin gentle general conditioning program (walking, stationary bike) with caution if unstable from pain medications  
No running/jogging  
No passive pulley exercise  
Aquatherapy may begin approximately **6 weeks** post operative if wounds healed

### **Criteria for progression to next phase (II)**

Passive forward flexion to  $\geq 125^\circ$   
Passive ER in scapular plane to  $\geq 60^\circ$  (if uninvolved shoulder PROM  $> 80^\circ$ )  
Passive IR in scapular plane to  $\geq 60^\circ$  (if uninvolved shoulder PROM  $> 80^\circ$ )  
Passive abduction in scapular plane to  $\geq 90^\circ$

### **Phase II: Protection and Protected Active Motion Phase (Weeks 7 to 12)**

#### **Goals**

Allow healing of soft tissue  
Do not overstress healing soft tissue  
Gradually restore full passive ROM (~ week 8)  
Decrease pain and inflammation

#### **Precautions**

No lifting  
No supported full body weight with hands or arms  
No sudden jerking motions  
No excessive behind back motions  
No bike or upper extremity ergometer until week 8

#### **Weeks 7-9**

Continue with full time use of sling/brace until end of week 6  
Gradually wean from brace starting several hours/day out progressing as tolerated  
Use brace sling for comfort only until full DC by end of week 7  
Initiate AAROM shoulder flexion from supine position week 6-7  
Progressive PROM until full PROM by week 8 (should be pain-free)  
May require use of heat prior to ROM exercises/joint mobilization  
Can begin passive pulley use  
    May require gentle glenohumeral or scapular joint mobilization as indicated to obtain full unrestricted ROM  
Initiate prone rowing to a neutral arm position  
Continue cryotherapy as needed post therapy/exercise

#### **Weeks 9-12**

Continue AROM, AAROM, and stretching as needed  
    Begin IR stretching, shoulder extension, and cross body, sleeper stretch to mobilize posterior capsule (if needed)  
Begin gentle rotator cuff submaximal isometrics (7-8 weeks)  
Begin glenohumeral submaximal rhythmic stabilization exercises in "balance position ( $90-100^\circ$  of elevation) in supine position to initiate dynamic stabilization  
Continue periscapular exercises progressing to manual resistance to all planes  
Seated press-ups

Initiate AROM exercises (flexion, scapular plane, abduction, ER, IR) (should be pain-free) low weight – initially only weight of arm  
Do not allow shrug during AROM exercises  
If shrug exists continue to work on cuff and do not reach/lift AROM over 90° elevation  
Initiate limited strengthening program  
\*Remember RTC and scapular muscles small and need endurance more than pure strength  
ER and IR with exercise bands/sport cord/tubing  
ER isotonic exercises in side lying (low-weight, high-repetition) may simply start with weight of arm  
Elbow flexion and extension isotonics

### **Criteria for progression to Phase III**

Full AROM

### **Phase III: Early Strengthening (Weeks 12-18)**

#### **Goals**

#### **Full AROM (weeks 12-14)**

Maintain full PROM  
Dynamic shoulder stability (GH and ST)  
Gradual restoration of GH and scapular strength, power and endurance  
Optimize neuromuscular control  
Gradual return to functional activities

#### **Precautions**

No lifting objects > 5 lbs, no sudden lifting or pushing  
Exercise should not be painful

#### **Week 12**

Continue stretching, joint mobilization, and PROM exercises as needed  
Dynamic strengthening exercises  
Initiate strengthening program  
Continue exercises as above weeks 7-12  
Scapular plane elevation to 90° (patient must be able to elevate arm without shoulder or scapular hiking before initiating isotonic exercises. If unable then continue cuff/scapular exercises)  
Full can (no empty can abduction exercises)  
Prone rowing  
Prone extension  
Prone horizontal abduction

#### **Week 14**

Continue all exercise listed above  
May begin BodyBlade, Flexbar, Boing below 45°  
Begin light isometrics in 90/90 or higher supine, PNF D2 flexion/extension patterns against light manual resistance  
Initiate light functional activities as tolerated

#### **Week 16**

Continue all exercises listed above  
Progress to fundamental exercises (bench press, shoulder press)  
Initiate low level plyometrics (2-handed, below chest level – progressing to overhead and finally 1-handed drills)

### **Criteria for progression to Phase IV**

Ability to tolerate progression to low-level functional activities  
Demonstrate return of strength/dynamic shoulder stability  
Reestablishment of dynamic shoulder stability  
Demonstrated adequate strength and dynamic stability for progression to more demanding work and sport-specific activities

**Phase IV: Advanced Strengthening Phases (Weeks 18-24)**

**Goals**

- Maintain full non-painful AROM
- Advanced conditioning exercise for enhanced functional and sports specific use
- Improve muscular strength, power and endurance
- Gradual return to all functional activities

**Week 18**

- Continue ROM and self-capsular stretching for ROM maintenance
- Continue progressive strengthening
- Advanced proprioceptive, neuromuscular activities
- Light isotonic strengthening in 90/90 position
- Initiation of light sports (golf chipping/putting, tennis ground strokes) if satisfactory clinical exam

**Week 24**

- Continue strengthening and stretching
- Continue joint mobilization and stretching if motion is tight
  - Initiate interval sports program (eg, golf, doubles tennis) if appropriate