Alexander Bollinger, M.D.
Shoulder, Elbow, Wrist, Hand
and Arthroscopic Surgery
www.aoaortho.com

ADVANCED ORTHOPAEDIC ASSOCIATES, P.A.

2778 N. Webb Road
Wichita, KS 67226
Phone: 316-631-1600
Fax: 316-631-1668

Protocol R6
Non-Operative Rehabilitation Program for Rotator Cuff Tear

Phase I: Motion Phase (weeks 0-3)

GOAL:

- Painless passive and active shoulder range of motion (ROM).

ANCILLARY MEASURES:

- Use pain medications as needed.
- Use moist heat modalities before exercises.
- Use ice after exercises.

EXERCISES:

- **Codman's Pendulum:** Stand adjacent to a chair or table and bend slightly at the waist. Support your body weight by leaning on the chair or table with the opposite arm. Let the full weight of the affected arm hang freely. Gently swing the affected arm forward and back, side to side as tolerated for 15 seconds. Progress to 3-5 minutes. Repeat 3 times each day.
- **Stick Exercises:** Using a stick, cane or yard stick, perform passive ROM in flexion, extension, abduction, external and internal rotation. Repeat 3 times per day, 10 repetitions.
- **Passive Forward Flexion:** Use a therapy helper or your opposite arm to gently raise arm up in front. Start with your affected arm at your side and passively bring your hand to mouth, then forehead, then top of head. Repeat 3 times per day, 10 repetitions.
- **Wall Climb:** Face a wall with hands out in front of body, touching the wall. Gradually use fingers to climb the wall, slowly raising the arms. At the peak, hold for 15-30 seconds.
- **Supine Overhead Stretching:** Begin in a supine position (lying flat on bed). Grip a stick with both hands. Raise the stick slowly overhead to toleration. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times per day.
- **Overhead Pulley:** Secure overhead pulley in doorway. Grasp both handles. At first, pull down on the normal or unaffected side while the stiff shoulder is relaxed (passive motion). Progress to active motion of the affected shoulder as tolerated. Repeat 3 times per day, 10 repetitions.
- **Active Range of Motion:** Without the use of a therapy helper or the opposite arm, raise up affected arm in flexion, extension, abduction, external and internal rotation. Push to peak so as gradually increasing motion. Repeat 3 times per day, 10 repetitions.
- **Isometrics:** Shoulder flexion, extension, abduction, external and internal rotation isometrics are encouraged. Shoulder shrug exercise as tolerated. Elbow flexion isometrics may be initiated.

PRECAUTION:

- Therapist should suspend therapy and send the patient back to our office if exercises are too painful or if clinical improvement plateaus.

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Phase II: Strengthening Phase (weeks 4-6)

GOALS:

- Maintain shoulder range of motion.
- Improve shoulder strength.

ANCILLARY MEASURES:

- Use pain medications as needed.
- Use moist heat modalities before exercises.
- Use ice after of exercises.

EXERCISES:

- **Continue all Phase I exercises.**
- **Isotonic Strengthening w/Therabands:** Secure the theraband to a doorknob or hook so that you may stretch the band until you feel resistance. Start using low resistive theraband, 10 repetitions, 3 times per day. Gradually increase repetitions to achieve goal 20-25 repetitions per exercise 3 times per day. Then graduate to more resistive theraband, begin with 10 repetitions and repeat process, gradually increasing the repetitions for each exercise. Strengthening exercises should include shoulder flexion, extension, abduction, internal rotation and external rotation. External rotation strengthening is most important.
- **Shoulder Shrug Exercise:** Start with simple shoulder shrug, lifting the top of your shoulders as high as they will go, 10 repetitions, repeat 3 times per day. Progress to shoulder shrugs against the resistance of a theraband, 10 repetitions, repeat 3 times per day. You may progress to more resistive therbands and gradually increase the repetitions.
- **Wall Push-Ups:** Stand facing a stationary wall. With shoulders and hands in a push-up position, slowly lean into the wall and push back to starting position (similar to a floor push-up). Gradually increase to 10 repetitions, repeat 3 times per day.
- **Anterior Deltoid Strengthening:** Start lying down on your back on a bed or flat surface. Grasp a small bottle or one pound weight with both hands, elbows bent 90 degrees. Raise the weight straight up overhead, then 15 degrees from vertical. Push inward, squeezing the weight with both hands. Hold for 5 seconds, then relax. Compete 10 repetitions, repeat 3 times per day.
- **Wall Washes:** Stand next to a wall grasping a folded towel on the affected side. Place the towel on the wall with elbow bent 90 degrees. Then, by slowly straightening your elbow, "wash the wall" with a wiping motion. Return to the starting position with elbow bent. Continue for 3 minutes, repeat 3 times per day.
- **Forward Lunges:** Stand facing a mirror. Bring affected arm forward and across your body with elbow straight (as though throwing a punch) while stepping foward with the opposite leg. Continue for 3 minutes, repeat 3 times per day.

PRECAUTION:

- Therapist should suspend therapy and send the patient back to our office if exercises are too painful or if clinical improvement plateaus.