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General Guidelines for Patients after Various Shoulder Specific Procedures

General Comments

Recovery from shoulder surgery can be lengthy and variable. Frequently it is 6-12 months before maximal improvement is reached. The shoulder joint is highly complex with significant variability among patients both in the severity of the injuries that occur and in their ability to recover and heal.

Arthroscopic Release of a Frozen Shoulder

Patients often remain in the hospital for two days in order to have pain control by intravenous medicines or by a catheter that numbs the nerves down the arm. You should arrange in advance for your physical therapy to start immediately on discharge from the hospital. This is important so as not to lose any motion gained by the arthroscopic release. You should start to use your arm right away and not wear your sling. Therapy is usually ordered for every day (five days/week) for the first two weeks and then adjusted by us after your first office visit.

Total or Partial Shoulder Replacement for Arthritis or Fracture

Therapy may or may not begin immediately on leaving the hospital. You will be instructed if you can do pendulum exercises on your own and you may see a therapist in the hospital for therapy. This depends on the type of surgery you have. You can use your arm from the elbow down but no active motion of the shoulder until ordered by us. We will review this with you on your first visit after surgery.

Shoulder Stabilization or Labral Repair for Instability

There will be a period of immobilization (no motion) of your shoulder while the repaired tissue heals. This varies from 3-6 weeks. You will be instructed if you can do pendulum type exercises on your own. This depends on the type of surgery you have. You can use your arm from the elbow down but no active motion of the shoulder is permitted until ordered by us. We will review this with you on your first visit after surgery.

Subacromial Decompression or Acromioplasty for Impingement

You will be permitted and encouraged to move your shoulder right away and you should plan to start therapy with a physical therapist within a few days of your surgery. The first few weeks will focus on regaining normal motion. After this a strengthening program will be initiated.

Rotator Cuff Repairs

The tendon repair needs 4-6 weeks to heal so active motion of the shoulder is not permitted during this time. Therapy will usually begin after your first visit to us and will be passive motion performed by the therapist. In some cases we will allow you to go in a pool and do motion under water where your arm will be weightless. You will need to wear your sling for 4-6 weeks. After this period you will begin a program of active motion and, eventually, strengthening.

Tendon Transfers for Massive Rotator Cuff Repairs or Shoulder Winging

These are highly specific procedures that are tailored to the individual situation. Most are immobilized for at least 6 weeks while the transferred tendon heals. After this period you will

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begin a program of active motion and, eventually, strengthening.

Fixation of Clavicle (Collar Bone) Fracture with Plate or Pin

There will be a period of immobilization (no motion) of your shoulder while the fractured bone starts to heal. This varies from 1-3 weeks. You will be instructed if you can do pendulum type exercises on your own. This depends on the type of surgery you have. You can use your arm from the elbow down but no active motion of the shoulder is permitted until ordered by us. X-rays will be checked post-operatively to assess healing.

Repair of Shoulder (AC Joint) Separation

The shoulder will be immobilized strictly for six weeks in a sling while the repaired tissue heals. You may use your hand below the elbow but you cannot move your shoulder. Therapy will usually begin at 4-6 weeks with passive motion performed by the therapist. After this period you will begin a program of active motion and eventually strengthening.

Biceps Tendon Tenodesis for Tears or Tendonitis

A sling will be used for for 3 weeks while the tendon is healing. Passive elbow passive range of motion (extension and flexion) is permitted although it is important to avoid pushing extension. At 4-6 weeks active elbow flexion is allowed. Strengthening begins thereafter.