

Physical Therapy Protocol: Rotator Cuff Repair

Phase 1: Weeks 0 through 6 – Repair Protection

Physician Goals: Protect the rotator cuff repair which is at its most vulnerable during this time, decrease pain, prevent significant stiffness

Exercises: Active elbow, wrist, and hand range of motion 3 to 5 times per day; pendulums; supine passive elevation in the scapular plane to maximum of 130°, passive external rotation with the arm at the side to maximum of 45°; side lying scapular stabilization exercises; deltoid isometrics in neutral

Comments: Sling with abduction pillow is to be worn at all times except when doing PT/home exercises, including sleep. Absolutely no active shoulder motion. Driving not recommended until sling is discontinued.

Total Visits: 12 – Once to twice per week with daily home stretching

Phase 2: Weeks 6 through 12 – Motion Recovery

Physician Goals: Continue to protect the rotator cuff repair which is only 50% as strong at the end of 12 weeks as it will be once fully healed, regain normal passive range of motion

Exercises: Passive stretching in all planes until full passive motion is regained; once full PROM, then begin active assisted ROM and transition to full active ROM as tolerated; cuff isometrics with the arm at the side, upper body ergometer; continue strengthening scapular stabilizers

Comments: Wean from sling after 6 week follow up visit; no lifting anything heavier than a cup of coffee; return to work on a case-by-case basis, OK to drive once sling is discontinued, OK for aquatic therapy

Total Visits: 18 – Two to three times per week with daily home stretching

Phase 3: Weeks 12 through 24+ – Strength Recovery

Physician Goals: Regain normal function of the shoulder beginning with activities of daily living and progressing to all activities without restrictions

Exercises: Continue passive stretching and joint mobilization as needed to regain/maintain full range of motion in all planes, progress resistance work with light hand weights or bands and progress as tolerated, increase weight/resistance when 30 repetitions are easy and painless; bicep curls and resisted supination; two hand plyometrics beginning at 4.5 months postop, transition to one as tolerated

Comments: Cuff strength will improve gradually over the course of the first two postoperative years, goal of PT is to regain strength needed to perform all ADLs and recreational activities without pain, transition to HEP when ready; Golfers may begin putting at 3 months, chipping at 4.5 months and progress to full golf by 6 months; Light tennis/pickleball at 4.5 months; overhead throwers (baseball/football) begin throwing program at 6 months

Total Visits: 24 – One to two times per week with daily home stretching; strengthening 3x per week including PT