

Open Rotator Cuff Repair – Postoperative Instructions

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- 1. Surgery:** Rotator cuff repair is performed in the operating room under general anesthesia. Depending on the specifics of the repair, a 1- to 3-inch incision is used. The goal of the surgery is to identify the torn tendon and repair it, using heavy stitches, back to its insertion onto bone. Postoperatively, the goal is to maintain shoulder motion while protecting the repair. To do this, we concentrate on passive shoulder motion, in which the arm is moved using power from another source (either your other arm or a physical therapist), while completely avoiding active shoulder motion, in which the arm is moved under its own power. Dr. Corsetti and your physical therapist will assist you in understanding these restrictions.
- 2. Rehabilitation Guidelines:** Most people can return to a desk job one to three weeks after surgery. In planning your return to work, you should expect to perform only the lightest tasks with your arm. If you are required to do any manual labor with your operative arm (including lifting anything heavier than 1 pound), you should plan to be out of work for two to three months. People performing heavy labor, even on an occasional basis, should plan to be out of work for five to six months postoperatively.
- 3. Physical Therapy:** Most patients who have undergone routine rotator cuff repair begin physical therapy two to four days after surgery. Proper physical therapy in the early postoperative period is critical to avoiding shoulder stiffness. If you do not have a physical therapy appointment, or if you have a problem starting physical therapy for any reason, you should notify Dr. Corsetti immediately.
- 4. Pain Control:** Patients who have undergone open rotator cuff repair experience significant pain in the first several days after surgery. You will be given a prescription for 40 tablets of Percocet to use after you are discharged. You may take up to two tablets every three hours as necessary. Keeping a large ice pack on the shoulder may help with postoperative pain, especially after physical therapy sessions.
- 5. Dressing:** Your dressing will be changed prior to discharge. You may remove it one to two days after discharge, assuming the wound is dry, and leave the incision uncovered. You should keep the incision clean and dry until two days after your sutures are removed (usually seven to 10 days after surgery).
- 6. Driving:** Most patients are able to drive an automatic transmission vehicle by four to six weeks after surgery. You will not be able to drive a standard transmission vehicle for at least three months if your right shoulder was operated on and eight to 10 weeks if your left shoulder was operated on.
- 7. Restrictions:** Your arm will be in a sling when you awake from surgery. You should wear your sling at all times while outside your house until cleared by Dr. Corsetti, usually four to eight weeks after surgery depending on the security of the repair. You may remove the sling while in your house, but it is critical to refrain from using the arm away from the side of the body until the repair is healed, six to eight weeks after surgery. Using the arm before that time jeopardizes the repair that was performed. You may, however, use the arm at your side for light activities only. Avoiding active shoulder motion until cleared by Dr. Corsetti is critical for a successful result.