Hands, Splints, Upper Limbs
Musculoskeletal and Sports Physiotherapy
Complex and Persistent Pain

Suite 15 Murdoch Medical Clinic
100 Murdoch Dr Murdoch 6150
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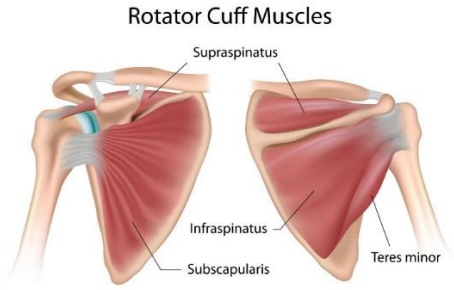
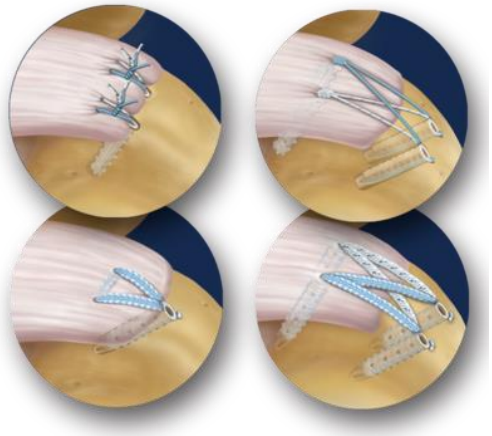
Rotator cuff repair surgery

Post-operative rehabilitation program

This is keyhole surgery, usually performed under a combination of general anaesthetic and a nerve block. It may be performed as a day procedure, but more commonly patients remain in hospital overnight to ensure they are comfortable.

The rotator cuff is a group of muscles that come from your shoulder blade (scapula) to help control the ball and socket joint in your shoulder. Shoulder pain can come from a torn rotator cuff in the shoulder, requiring surgery and rehabilitation.





The operation is usually performed through two small incisions (about 1cm). The surgeon inserts an arthroscope through one incision and examines the shoulder joint and tendons to confirm the cause of the symptoms.

The arthroscope is then used to view and guide the surgery performed through the second incision. If necessary the surgeon may decide to perform an open repair through a larger incision.

The incisions are sutured and dressed, and the arm is placed in a special sling with a cushion under the arm to protect the repaired rotator cuff. The sling needs to be used all the time for 4-6 weeks. Gentle exercises are started the day after your operation, guided by your physiotherapist.

Call Flex Physiotherapy 9332 6422 for further information.

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Post-operative Rehabilitation Guidelines

The recovery process is individual, and varies considerably with regards to pain, stiffness and progression back to normal function. This difference in recovery time can be up to 3-12 months, depending on your injury, age, job and other medical conditions.

Time frame	Expected issues	Your job
0-6 weeks	Unable to use arm Pain at rest	Passive exercises Medications and ice
6-12 weeks	Difficulty using arm Pain with movement Stiffness and weakness	Active movement Medications
3-6 months	Difficulty high overhead and behind back Weakness < stiffness	Strengthening exercises Return to light duties
6 months +	Occasional pain with fast or heavy movement Early fatigue during activities	Strength and endurance exercises Return to full work duties / Sport

Exercises

- **Don't lift your arm without assistance otherwise the repair can be compromised.**
- After your shoulder operation it is very important to perform the exercises on the following pages to regain your mobility over the first 4-6 weeks.
- Don't use the muscles in the operated shoulder to raise the arm away from your side, even in the sling.
- Only perform exercises taught to you by your physiotherapist or surgeon.
- Exercises should be performed 3-5 times a day. It may be helpful to take pain medication 30-40 minutes prior to exercise (as prescribed by your doctor).

Swelling

- You may have considerable swelling around your shoulder after surgery.
- **Apply ice for a maximum of 20 minutes following exercises or as required.**
- Ice (crushed, cubes, frozen peas, gel pack etc.) should be wrapped in a towel and placed directly on the shoulder, over the waterproof dressing.

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Pain

- Immediately after your surgery, pain at rest and with movement is expected.
- Take your medication and use ice regularly to keep your pain mild-moderate (<4/10).
- Many people develop pain around the neck, upper back and down the arm which is normal, but if you are concerned please call your physiotherapist.
- If you develop worsening tingling or numbness, please call your physiotherapist.

Sling

- The sling is for protection for the first 6 weeks after the operation.
- Ensure your **elbow is in the corner of the sling**, and **hand supported** inside the sling.
- Your arm should rest comfortably in the sling, with the entire weight of the arm supported and with your hand at the level of your chest.
- Wear the sling both day and night (including sleeping).
- **Only** remove the sling for showering, and when doing the prescribed exercises.

Driving

- **No driving for 4 weeks** to ensure that the repair site heals well.
- Await instructions from your surgeon or physiotherapist to commence driving.

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Start these exercises (pages 4-6) the day after your operation

Elbow straightening

- Remove your arm from the sling.
- Raise your hand towards your shoulder.
- If your hand throbs, keep attempting as many as you can, as long as it is not painful.

At least 3 times per day, 10 repetitions

Neck mobility

- Look up/down, turn side to side, and tilt your head in both directions

5 repetitions, 3 times per day

If you have neck problems before your surgery, please ask your physiotherapist about alternative exercises you should do.

Gripping

- Curl your fingers around a stress ball, a pair of rolled up socks, or a sponge

Squeeze 20-30 times, 3 times per day

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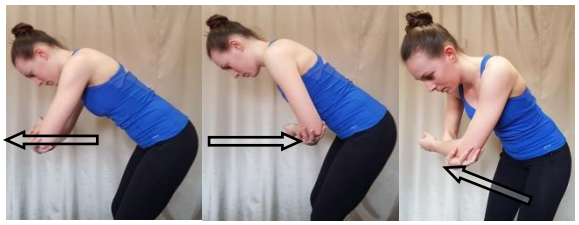
Passive Exercises – gentle movement with assistance

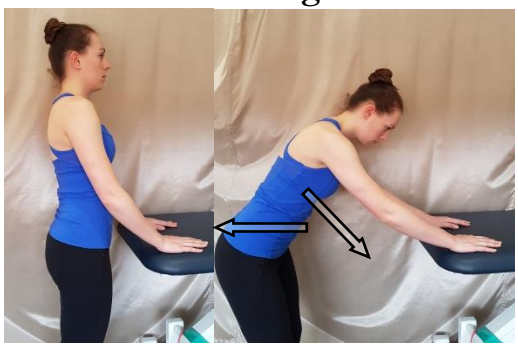
Pendular exercises



- Hold your elbow with the other hand.
- Bend forward at the hips.
- Using your good arm, gently roll your arm backwards and forwards, side to side, and in circles.

3 times per day, 10 repetitions

Arm elevation using table



- Stand in front of a table.
- Rest your hand on the table in front of you.
- Step backwards away from the table, keeping your shoulder relaxed until a stretch is felt.
- Return to upright.

3 times per day, 10 repetitions

Arm turn out with stick

- Hold a stick in with your palms facing up.
- Place a towel between your sore arm and your body.
- Keep the elbow (sore arm side) tucked in holding it against the towel.
- Use your good hand to push the stick and the sore hand out to the side until you feel a gentle stretch or discomfort.

3 times per day, 10 repetitions

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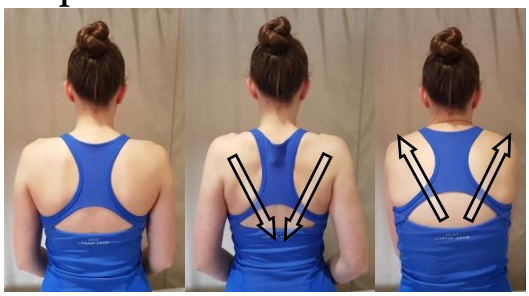
Arm out with pilow

- Sitting in a chair next to a table, rest your elbow on a pillow on the table.
- Helping with the other hand, gently push the arm open moving towards the sore side.

3 times per day, 5 repetitions

Scapula retraction



- In sitting or standing, draw your shoulders down and back.
- Hold 2-3 seconds, then relax and slump your shoulders.

Perform 5 times per day, 10 repetitions.

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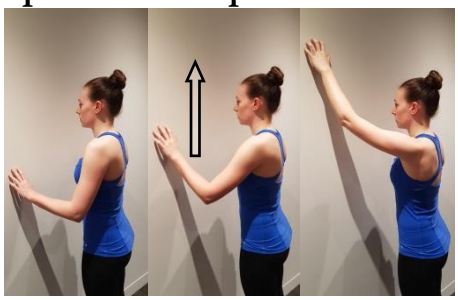
After your surgeon has given you the all clear, you can try these exercises under the guidance of a physiotherapist.

Spider crawl up a wall



- Place your fingers on a wall at about waist height.
- Use your fingers to help 'crawl' your hand up the wall until you feel a gentle stretch or discomfort in your shoulder.

3 times per day, 10-20 repetitions

Opposite hand assisted arm raises

- Assist sore arm up by holding your elbow in the opposite hand.
- Use the opposite hand to do ALL of the work to assist your sore arm up.

3 times per day, 10-20 repetitions

Stick assisted arm elevation

- Hold a stick.
- Use the opposite hand to do ALL of the work to assist your sore arm up.

3-5 times per day, 10-20 repetitions