PATIENT GUIDE · ROTATOR CUFF REPAIR

Your Rotator Cuff Recovery Roadmap

Keep this page. The repair needs time to heal to the bone. Patience now protects it.

David Gazzaniga, MD
Sports Medicine
(949) 759-3600

Your recovery timeline

0–6 weeks — PHASE 1 · PROTECT
Sling on, including sleep. Pendulum exercises at home. **Do not lift your arm forward or out to the side, or rotate it outward. Keep your hand in front of your belly.**

6–12 weeks — PHASE 2 · MOTION
Sling off at 6 weeks. Therapy begins: move the arm on your own, no stretching. Lift up to 2 lb. **Goal: as much motion as you can get without pain.**

3–6 months — PHASE 3 · STRENGTH
Strengthening begins. Light lifting, such as a gallon of milk or a bag of groceries.

6–9 months — PHASE 4 · RETURN TO ACTIVITY
Golf at 6 months. Easy tennis ground strokes at 6–7 months. Heavy or overhead work after 6 months.

9–12 months — FULL RECOVERY
Throwing begins at 9 months. **Most shoulders feel normal somewhere between 6 and 12 months.** Every recovery is different, so don't be discouraged if yours takes longer.

Protect the repair for the first 4 months

Everyone: no quick movements with the arm, like closing a sliding door or tossing something underhand.

If your subscapularis (the front of the cuff) was repaired, it is at extra risk. Also do not: turn the arm outward past 30° · push up from a chair with that arm · tuck in your shirt behind your back.

The first six weeks

Sling: Wear it day and night. Loosen or remove it only for elbow exercises and showering.

Driving: No driving while you are in the sling.

Work: Desk work is usually OK within 2 weeks if you can keep the arm at your side.

Incisions: About five small incisions, stitched under the skin, with steri-strips. Keep the dressing on for 5 days, then remove it and shower.

Good to know

Sleeping: Semi-upright is most comfortable: a stack of pillows, a wedge or a recliner.

Ice: Helps with pain, but is optional.

Biceps tenodesis: If you had one, no lifting against resistance with that elbow until 6 weeks.

Some smaller repairs follow a faster plan. We will tell you if this applies to you.

Call us at (949) 759-3600 if you have: fever over 101°F · increasing redness, drainage or opening of an incision · new calf pain or swelling. **Chest pain or trouble breathing: call 911.**