

Rotator cuff repair

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The problem:

A tear of the tendon of the rotator cuff.

Reason for treatment:

Pain and/or weakness.

The treatment:

Surgery is done arthroscopically usually through three to six holes. Devices called suture anchors are used to repair the torn tendon. These anchors have sutures attached to them. The anchors are placed in the bone. The suture attached to the anchor is then passed through the torn tendon and tied down to bring the tendon back to the bone as it was originally before it was torn. The anchors are made of either metal or plastic, but they do not have any effect on metal detectors because of their small size. In addition to fixing the rotator cuff, the soft tissue above the rotator cuff, called the bursa, is also removed as this contributes to pain.

Day of surgery:

The patient arrives 2 hours before the procedure to meet the operative team. A catheter is placed in their vein (IV) and the patient is given a nerve block. The nerve block helps with pain after the surgery for approximately 12 hours. The patient is still put to sleep during the surgery. The surgery itself takes about one hour, but the setup time in the operating room and the takedown time add one half hour to an hour. The surgery is done with the patient in the sitting position, so care is taken to position the patient appropriately. The patient stays in the recovery room for 1-2 hours. Most patients stay overnight for pain control, but some go home as well.

After surgery:

The patient wears a sling for 4 weeks. The patient keeps the wound dry for 7 days. Sponge baths are appropriate. The sling is removed only to take a bath or shower and when sitting standing while awake and away from crowds. It should always be worn when asleep during the first 4 weeks. Physical therapy is started at the first postoperative visit and continues usually for 3 months. Recovery is usually complete at 6 months to a year.

The shoulder is very painful for several days and is uncomfortable for several weeks. Pain is managed with ice and narcotic pain medication. Narcotic pain medication is stopped by the sixth week after surgery. Anti-inflammatory medication may be started at 4-6 weeks if needed. Recovery is very slow and requires patience and perseverance. Rotator cuff surgery is known to be painful and require a prolonged recovery.