



Dr. John Awowale, MD Rotator Cuff Repair Protocol
Phase 1 – Protection & Initial ROM
Weeks 0-6

Goals for phase 1

- Minimize pain and inflammation
- Protect integrity of the repair
- Initiate shoulder PROM
- Prevent muscular inhibition

Criteria for progression to Phase 2

- Full PROM
- Flexion PROM > 125°
- ER PROM in scapular plane to >75° (if uninvolved shoulder PROM >80°)
- IR PROM in scapular plane to >75° (if uninvolved shoulder PROM >80°)
- Abduction PROM to >90° in scapular plane

Other considerations

- Begin formal PT after 2 week MD visit unless instructed otherwise
- Subscapularis repair: Limit shoulder ER PROM to 30° for 6 weeks post-op

Brace

- Patient will wear an abduction pillow and sling for 6 weeks post-op

Initial Post-Op Exercises Days 0-14

- Gentle pendulum exercises 2-3x/day out of sling
- Elbow/hand gripping and ROM exercises 4-6x/day
- Cryotherapy as needed

PROM

- Weeks 2-4: Initiate PROM: Flexion/Abduction to 90°: ER/IR/Extension to 30°
- Weeks 4-5: PROM Flexion/Abduction to 120°: ER/Extension to 30°: IR to 45°
- Weeks 5-6: PROM progress as tolerated all directions

AAROM

- Weeks 5-6: Progress AAROM as able to regain full motion

AROM

- Weeks 5-6: Initiate AROM exercises. Don't raise arm through shoulder shrug sign.

Manual Therapy

- Weeks 2-4: May begin joint mobilizations grades I-II for pain control
- Weeks 5-6: Joint mobilizations grades II-III

Strengthening

- Weeks 2-4: Scapular and glenohumeral submax isometrics
- Weeks 4-5: Resistance band strengthening, scapular strengthening including prone rows, prone extension, prone horizontal abduction, etc.

Modalities

- Use of cryotherapy as needed for pain/swelling control
- Weeks 4-5: May use heat prior to ROM exercises



Phase 2 – AROM & Scapular Strengthening Progression Weeks 6 – 14

Goals for phase 2

- Minimize pain and inflammation
- Restore full shoulder PROM
- Restore full shoulder AROM

Criteria for progression to Phase 3

- Full AROM and PROM
- Pain free with all strengthening exercises
- Dynamic shoulder stability

Other considerations

- No residual pain should be present following exercises

PROM

- Restore and maintain full shoulder PROM
- Weeks 11-14: Stretch posterior capsule with cross body adduction stretching

AAROM

- Continue as needed

AROM

- Week 7: Progress AROM without shoulder shrug sign

Manual Therapy

- Week 7: Joint mobilizations grades III-IV to address capsular adhesions

Strengthening

- Week 7: Rhythmic stabilization exercises (flexion at 45°, 90°, 100° & ER/IR at multiple angles)
- Week 7: Isotonic strengthening: flexion to 90°, scaption to 90°, bicep curls, triceps extension
- Weeks 8-9: Initiate light functional activities if physician permits in pain free ROM, starting at waist level activities progressing to shoulder level activities, then overhead activities
- Week 10: Progress to fundamental shoulder exercises, abduction to 90°, prone horizontal abduction, prone scaption
- Week 10: initiate isotonic resistance (0.5 kg weight) during flexion and abduction if patient exhibits nonpainful normal motion without substitution patterns
- Weeks 11-14: progress all exercises as able

Modalities

- Use of cryotherapy as needed for pain/swelling control



Phase 3- Shoulder Strengthening Weeks 14-24

Goals for phase 3

- Minimize pain and inflammation
- Maintain full shoulder PROM and AROM
- Improve shoulder, scapular, and total arm strength
- Improve neurodynamic stabilization of the shoulder
- No shoulder shrug sign with strengthening exercises

Criteria for progression to Phase 4

- Maintenance of full pain-free ROM
- Functional use of upper extremity
- Full muscular strength and power

PROM/AROM

- Weeks 14-20: Continue ROM and stretching to maintain full ROM

Manual Therapy

- Continue joint mobilizations as needed

Strengthening

- Weeks 15-20: Progress strengthening as able
- Examples: Diagonals with resistance band in D2 pattern, push up plus on wall (progress to floor), dynamic hug with band, IR at 90° with band, standing forward punch with band, ER with weight or band (supported & unsupported at 90°), bicep curls
- Weeks 20-24: Gradually increase resistance without shoulder shrug compensation

Flexibility

- Weeks 14-20: Self capsular stretches, sleeper stretch, behind the back IR with towel, cross body stretch, doorway ER stretch

Modalities

- Use of cryotherapy as needed for pain/swelling control



Phase 4 – Return to Activity Weeks 24+

Goals for phase 4

- Minimize pain and inflammation
- Maintain full shoulder PROM and AROM
- Restore shoulder, scapular and total arm strength, power and endurance
- Restore neurodynamic stabilization of the shoulder
- Safe and effective return to previous level of function for occupational, sport or desired activities

Strengthening/Flexibility

- Continue fundamental shoulder exercise program (at least 4x/week)
- Continue stretching if motion is tight

Modalities

- Use of cryotherapy as needed for pain/swelling control

Work related activities

- Progress back to work related activities

Sport related activities

- Progress back to sport related activities

Criteria for return to work, function, sport

- Minimal pain with phase 4 exercises
- Full, pain free shoulder PROM and AROM
- Shoulder, scapular, and total arm strength \geq 90% of the uninvolved side (4+/5)