

Rehabilitation Guidelines for Anatomic Shoulder Arthroplasty

Phase 1: Hospital to 1st Follow-Up (0–2 Weeks)

Protect the Subscapularis

- Patients may shower immediately over the clear plastic waterproof dressing.
- Waterproof (Tegaderm) dressing will be removed by the surgeon at the first post-op visit.
- All sutures are beneath the skin and will dissolve on their own.
- Sling should be worn at all times except while showering or performing shoulder exercises.
- While lying supine, support the distal humerus/elbow with a pillow or towel roll to avoid shoulder extension.

Therapy Instructions (Beginning Postoperative Day 1)

To be performed 3 times per day, starting immediately:

- Elbow, forearm, and hand AROM
- Supine passive ROM – flexion to 130°, external rotation (ER) to 20°

Place a small towel behind the elbow to avoid shoulder hyperextension and anterior capsular stretch.

- Emphasize adherence to the home exercise program (HEP).
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Phase 2: Protect the Subscapularis (2–6 Weeks)

- Continue wearing the sling at night and in public; may remove during the day with the following restrictions:
 - Limit ER to 20°
 - No resisted internal rotation (IR)
 - Avoid shoulder extension and reaching behind the back
 - Do not lift > 2–3 lbs with the operative arm
 - Support elbow with a pillow or towel roll while supine

Continue Phase 1 Exercises, plus:

- Pendulum exercises
 - AAROM (Active-Assisted ROM):
 - Pulleys into scapular plane elevation up to 130°, ER to 20°
 - Supine AAROM into flexion and ER (respecting above limits)
 - Emphasize daily home exercise program
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Phase 3: Strength and Motion Advancement (6–10 Weeks)

- Discontinue sling use
- Maintain 10-lb lifting restriction
- Advance AROM and PROM as tolerated
 - Maintain ER limit of 30° until 10 weeks
 - Progress elevation as tolerated
- Begin scapular stabilizer strengthening
- Strengthen rotator cuff and shoulder musculature using:
 - Isometrics
 - Theraband or dumbbells

Avoid resisted IR or extension until after 10 weeks.

Phase 4: Advanced Strengthening and Return to Function (>10 Weeks)

- Gradually advance shoulder ER range of motion with light stretching only.
- Begin subscapularis strengthening (resisted IR and extension).
- Progress overall shoulder and rotator cuff strengthening as tolerated.
- Initiate low-level functional activities at approximately 3 months, including:
 - Swimming
 - Water aerobics
 - Light tennis
 - Jogging
- Start higher-level activities at 4 months, such as:
 - Tennis
 - Light weight training
 - Golf
- Begin sport-specific functional progression at 4 months.