Standard Arthroscopic Rotator Cuff Repair Rehabilitation Protocol

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR THERAPISTS

• Therapy begins **2 weeks after surgery** for this protocol.
• The patient should work with their therapist **1–3x per week** until released by the surgeon.
• If there are concerns, please contact the surgeon's office.

SLING WEAR

• A **sling with a small pillow** is worn for **6 weeks after surgery**.
• The sling is to be worn **at all times**, including while sleeping.
• It may only be removed for **therapy exercises and showering**.

ICE

• The use of **ice or an ice machine** is encouraged to help control pain and inflammation.

ACTIVITY RESTRICTIONS

Activity	Timing
Showering	72 hours after surgery
Deskwork	When comfortable with sling
Driving	After sling is off (6 weeks)
Using arm for ADLs	6 weeks
Reaching overhead	12 weeks
Reaching behind back	6 weeks
Carrying light objects	6 weeks
Pushing / Pulling	6 weeks
Sport / Heavy activity	After therapy completion

PROTOCOL OVERVIEW

All time points are based on time since surgery.

PHASE 1: PASSIVE RANGE OF MOTION (2–4 WEEKS)

• Begins **2 weeks after surgery**.
• The therapist or assistant moves the patient's arm while supine.

• Begin **pendulum** and **scapular mobility** (shrugs, depression, retraction, protraction).
• Encourage **hand, wrist, and elbow motion** as tolerated.

PHASE 2: ACTIVE ASSISTED RANGE OF MOTION (4–8 WEEKS)

• Begin **active assisted range of motion**.
• **Weeks 4–5:** Supine — use the opposite arm, stick, or cane to move the surgical arm.
• **Week 5:** Perform at **45° upright**.
• **Week 6:** Perform **upright**; pulleys may be used for forward elevation.

PHASE 3: ACTIVE RANGE OF MOTION (8–12 WEEKS)

• Begin **active motion** in forward elevation, external rotation, and abduction.
• Continue active assisted exercises.
• Begin **isometric strengthening**.

PHASE 4: RESISTED EXERCISE (12–16 WEEKS)

• Begin **resisted strengthening** with elastic bands or light hand weights.
• Add **scapular strengthening** exercises.
• **Do NOT perform Full or Empty-Can exercises.**

DETAILED PROTOCOL

PHASE 1 (Start 2 Weeks After Surgery)

Passive Range of Motion

- **0–2 weeks:** None
- **2–4 weeks:** Begin passive range of motion (PROM)
    - Limit to 90° flexion, 45° external rotation (ER), 20° extension, 45° abduction, and 45° abduction with external rotation (ABER)
    - Avoid stretching the anterior capsule and shoulder extension
    - Begin posterior capsule mobilizations and Codman's pendulum exercises
- The patient must stay relaxed; **no muscle contraction** during movement.

Pendulum Exercises

- Performed at therapy sessions and **at home twice daily**.
- Use the **torso to move the arm** by rocking body weight — not shoulder muscles.
- Move arm gently in **clockwise and counterclockwise** directions.

Scapula Exercises

- Performed **in sling** for first 6 weeks.
- Include **elevation (shrugs), depression, retraction, and protraction**.
- After 6 weeks, continue **out of sling** until strengthening begins (12 weeks).
- May be performed **daily**.

PHASE 2 (Start 4 Weeks After Surgery)

Active Assisted Range of Motion (4–5 Weeks)

- Begin at **4 weeks** using unaffected arm or a stick/cane to move the surgical arm.
- Motions: forward elevation, external rotation, and abduction.
- Performed **daily**.

Supine Active Assisted Forward Elevation

- Using a stick or cane, the normal arm raises the affected arm overhead.

Supine Active Assisted External Rotation

- Keep affected arm close to body, elbow bent to 90°.
- Use the cane to gently rotate outward.

Supine Active Assisted Abduction

- Keep elbow straight and move arm out to the side comfortably.

Active Assisted Range of Motion (5–8 Weeks)

- **Week 5:** Perform at **45° upright** using a stick or cane.
- **Week 6:** Perform **upright**; **pulleys** are allowed for forward elevation.
- Done **daily**.

PHASE 3 (Start 8 Weeks After Surgery)

Active Range of Motion (8–12 Weeks)

- Continue active assisted exercises.
- Begin **active motion** in forward elevation and abduction.
- Avoid **shoulder hiking**.
- Use mirror feedback or place hand on shoulder to monitor motion.

Isometric Exercises (8–12 Weeks)

- Begin gentle **isometrics** with pillow or towel against a wall.

Isometric Push and Pull

- With arm close to the body, push forward with fist, then pull backward with elbow.
- Hold **15 seconds**, rest **30 seconds**, repeat **10–15x daily**.

Isometric External and Internal Rotation

- Push with **back of hand** for external rotation, **palm** for internal rotation.
- Hold **15 seconds**, rest **30 seconds**, repeat **10–15x daily**.

PHASE 4 (Start 12 Weeks After Surgery)

Resisted Exercises (12–16 Weeks)

- Begin **resisted strengthening** 3x/week.
- Perform **10–15 repetitions**, rest **2 minutes**, repeat **3–4 sets**.
- Focus on **scapular strengthening** and **light stretching**.

Resisted Scapula Strengthening

- Locked elbow extension (trapezius).
- Press-up plus reach (serratus).
- Rows using elastic bands or light weights.

Rotator Cuff Strengthening

- Arm close to body.
- Use tubing for **internal and external rotation**.
- May perform side-lying with light weights.
- 10–15 reps, 3–4 sets, 3x/week.

Deltoid Strengthening

- Use tubing for **forward punches** and **pulling back**.
- 10–15 reps, 3–4 sets, 3x/week.
- **Do NOT perform Full or Empty-Can exercises.**

Shoulder Stretching

- Perform **daily**.
- Hold each stretch **15 seconds**, rest **15 seconds**, repeat **5 times**.
- Stretches include:
    - **Corner Stretch** – anterior shoulder
    - **Towel, Cross-Body, and Sleeper Stretches** – posterior shoulder
- Begin gentle; after **16 weeks**, progress to **aggressive stretching** if needed.

Exercises:

- Cycling or running as tolerated beginning at 12 weeks

PHASE 5 (4–6 Months)***

Range of Motion:

- Full and pain-free

Immobilizer:

- None

Exercises:

- Aggressive scapular stabilization and eccentric strengthening
- Scapular perturbation training

- Begin plyometric and throwing/racquet programs
- Continue endurance activities
- Maintain range of motion and flexibility

PHASE 6 (6–8 Months)

Range of Motion:

- Full and pain-free

Immobilizer:

- None

Exercises:

- Progress Phase IV activities
- Gradual return to full activity as tolerated

Notes

- * If a **distal clavicle excision** is performed, restrict **horizontal adduction** for 8 weeks post-op.
- ** If a **biceps tenodesis** is performed, avoid **active biceps flexion** and **eccentric biceps loads** for 8 weeks post-op.
- *** Limited return to sports activities may begin during Phase 5 **if cleared by the surgeon**.