



Mohit N. Gilotra, MD  
UNIVERSITY of MARYLAND  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

**ARTHROSCOPIC SHOULDER SURGERY  
REHABILITATION PROTOCOL  
MASSIVE ROTATOR CUFF REPAIR**

**GENERAL GUIDELINES**

- The local anesthetic (similar to novacaine) in your shoulder will last 6-12 hours
  - Start taking the pain medication as soon as you start feeling pain
- Use cryotherapy continuously for the first 72 hours, then as-needed thereafter
  - Ensure that the cryotherapy cuff never contacts the skin directly
  - Apply to the shoulder after performing rehab exercises for the first 12 weeks
- Remove the bandage 48 hours after surgery, but leave the white steristrips on the skin
  - Apply fresh gauze pad or bandaid to any incision that is moist or weeping
- You may shower after dressing removal as long as the incisions/steristrips are dry
  - All incisions must be completely dry for 24 hours before getting wet in shower
  - Do NOT submerge the shoulder underwater for the first 6 weeks
- The sling is for comfort and to protect the repair.
  - Wear the sling for the first 6 weeks, removing it for exercises and showers
  - Wear the sling when out of the house for the first 8 weeks
- Schedule a follow-up appointment for one week after surgery 410-448-6400

**PHASE I**

Begins immediately post-op through the first postoperative visit (4 weeks)

**Goals:**

- Protect the shoulder and minimize inflammation
- Ensure skin healing
- Initiate early range of motion

**Sling:**

- Wear the sling full-time, sponge bath keeping surgical site/sling dry
- May type or write in the sling.
- No holding or carrying anything heavier than a pen/pencil

**Therapeutic Exercises (remove sling to perform 2 times/day starting 7 days postop):**

- Elbow/hand/wrist active-assist range of motion
- *External rotation stretching.* Use the uninvolved arm to passively rotate the hand/arm on the surgical side to the outside (away from the belly).

**PHASE II**

Begins 4 weeks postoperatively and extends to 8 weeks postoperatively

**Goals:**

- Protect the shoulder and the repair
- Regain range of motion

**Sling:**

- Wear the sling full-time, removing only for shower and exercises
- May type or write in the sling.
- No holding/carrying anything heavier than a pen/pencil

**Therapeutic Exercises (3 times per day):**

- *Supine passive forward elevation stretching.*
- *External rotation stretching*
- *Scapular retractions*

**PHASE III**

Begins 8 weeks postoperatively and extends to 12 weeks postoperatively

**Goals:**

- Protect the repair
- Maximize range of motion
- Initiate active range of motion while minimizing inflammation

**Sling:**

- Discontinue the sling at home after 8 weeks
- Wear the sling outside of the home for the first 10 weeks

**Activities:**

- No lifting or carrying anything heavier than a cup of coffee or can of soda
- No reaching away from your body without assistance from the other arm

**Therapeutic Exercises (3 times per day):**

- All exercises from Phase II daily
- *Wall-climb and/or pulley assisted elevation in scapular plane*
- *Behind-the-back internal rotation*
- *Supported active shoulder rotation*
- *Supine cross-body stretch*
- *Hands-behind-head stretch* (start 7 weeks postoperatively if SLAP repair)
- Active prone elevations (forward, scapular-plane, lateral/abduction, extension)
- NO weights, resistance, or theraband strengthening

## **PHASE IV**

Begins 12 weeks postoperatively until 18 weeks postoperatively

### **Criteria for advancement to Phase IV:**

- Full, painless range of motion

### **Activities:**

- No holding or carrying anything heavier than 5 pounds
- No lifting anything heavier than 1 pound away from your body

### **Goals:**

- Initiate early functional strengthening
- Protect the repair

### **Therapeutic Exercises (stretching every day, strengthening every other day):**

- All exercises from Phase III
- Stretching in all planes
- *Theraband internal* and *external* rotation in shoulder adduction (arm at the side)

## **PHASE V**

Begins 18 weeks postoperatively

### **Goals:**

- Maximize functional strength

### **Therapeutic Exercises:**

- All exercises from Phase III
- Theraband and progressive dynamic strengthening

## **RETURN TO SPORT**

Requires clearance from physician

Sport training/practice once shoulder at 90% of uninvolved side

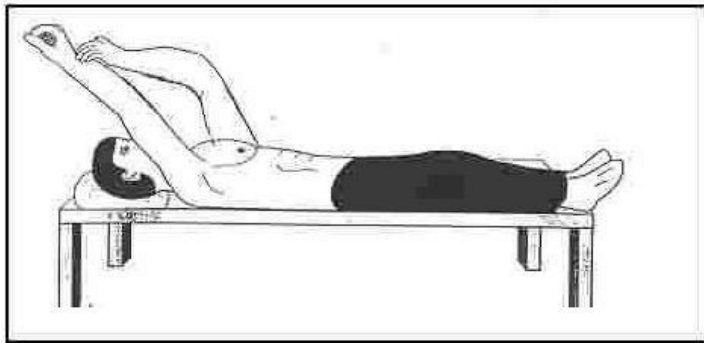
- Start with 'walk-through' at < 1% of maximum effort
- Increase 10% effort each session as tolerated

Goal of return to full participation in contact sports at 7 months

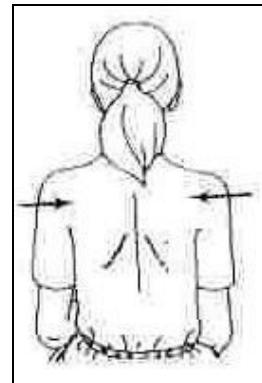
**Selected Exercise Diagrams (Phase 1 and 2)**



*External rotation stretching*

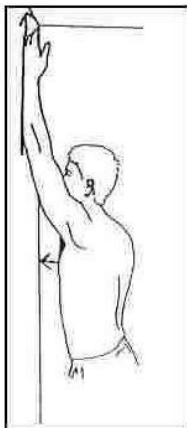


*Supine active-assisted forward elevation stretching*



*Scapular retractions*

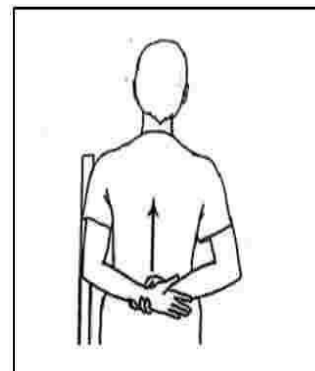
**Selected Exercise Diagrams (Phase 3)**



*Wall climb*

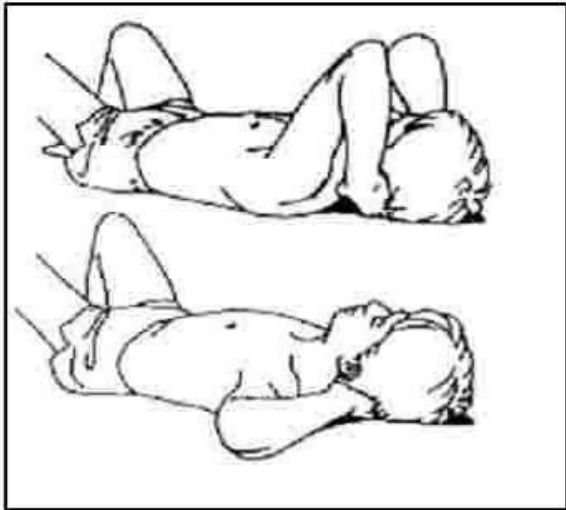


*Supported active shoulder rotation*



*Behind-the-back stretching*

**Selected Exercise Diagrams (Phase 3)**

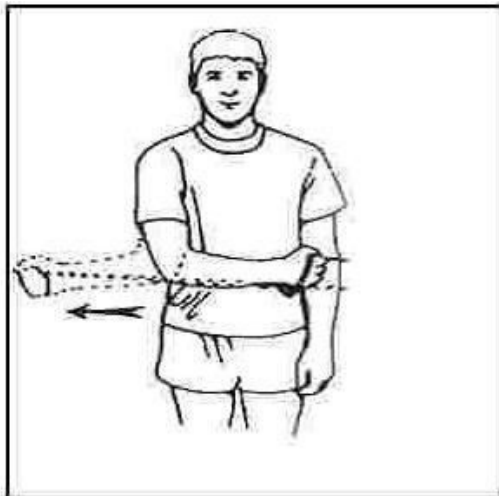


*Hands-behind-head stretch*  
*External rotation stretching in abduction/elevation*

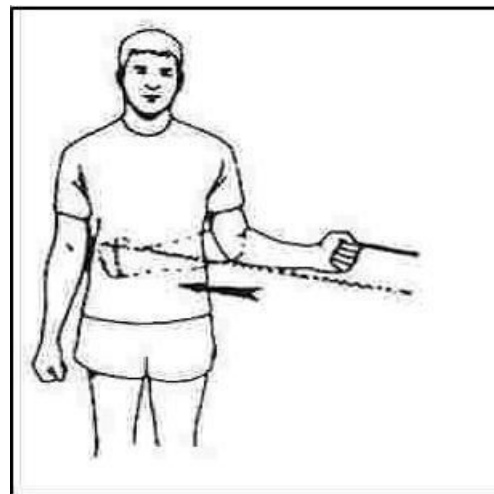


*Cross-body stretching*

**Selected Exercise Diagrams (Phase 4)**



*Theraband external rotation*



*Theraband internal rotation*