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Rehabilitation Guidelines for Large/Massive Rotator Cuff Tears Following Surgical Repair

Phase I: 0-6 weeks Post-op:

Goals:

1. Patient education
2. Permit healing
3. Control pain and inflammation
4. Initiate range of motion exercises

Immediate Post-op or Post-op day #1:

1. Patients may be immobilized in sling or abduction brace
2. Pendulums
3. Hand squeezes
4. Elbow AROM

7-10 Days Post-op:

1. Pendulums
2. Supine PROM forward elevation and external rotation above level of brace
3. Heat and ice
4. Active scapular exercises (shoulder shrugs and scapular retraction)

Phase II: 6-12 weeks Post-op:

Goals:

1. Improve to full ROM
2. Improve neuromuscular control and strength

Treatment:

1. Continue all stretches
2. Add Phase II stretches (IR, cross body adduction, and extension)
3. Rotator cuff isometrics (submaximal)
4. Phase I strengthening (ER, IR, extension)

Resisted scapular strengthening (with arms below shoulder height)

Phase III: 12-16 weeks Post-op:

Goals:

1. Full pain-free ROM
2. Optimize neuromuscular control
3. Improve endurance
4. Initiate return to functional activities

Treatment:

1. Continue all stretches and strengthening
2. Progress to Phase II strengthening when at green for all Phase I exercises (abduction, forward elevation, ER @ 45° in POS with arm supported)
3. Manual resistance for rotator cuff and deltoid
4. Bodyblade in non-provocative positions

Phase IV: 16 weeks – 6 months Post-op:

Goals:

1. Return to work, sport, or desired activities (in appropriate patient)
2. Promote concept of prevention

Treatment:

1. Work hardening
2. Gradual return to work or desired activity
3. Progress Bodyblade into elevated positions
4. Work/sport specific exercises