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Rehabilitation Guidelines for Small/Medium 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. Immobilized in sling
 - Use for comfort and public only
2. Pendulum
3. Hand squeezes
4. Elbow AROM
 - Supine PROM forward elevation (in appropriate patient)

3-10 Days Post-op:

1. Pendulums
2. Supine PROM forward elevation and external rotation (@ 45° in POS)
3. Heat and ice
4. Active scapular exercises (shoulder shrugs and scapular retraction)

Phase II: 6-8 weeks Post-op:

Goals:

1. Improve to full ROM
2. Improve neuromuscular control and strength
3. Emphasize normal scapulohumeral rhythm

Treatment:

1. Continue all stretches
2. Add Phase II stretches (extension, internal rotation, cross body adduction)
3. Rotator cuff isometrics (submaximal)

4. Phase I strengthening (ER, IR, extension)

Resisted scapular strengthening (with arms below shoulder height)

Phase III: 8-12 weeks Post-op:

Goals:

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

Treatment:

1. Resisted scapular strengthening
2. Manual resistance for rotator cuff and deltoid
3. Bodyblade below 45⁰
4. Progress to Phase II strengthening when at green for all Phase I exercises (abduction, forward elevation, ER @ 45⁰ in POS with arm supported)
5. Appropriate variable resistance and/or weight resistance
6. Strengthening above 90⁰
7. Bodyblade

Phase IV: 12 weeks – 6 months Post-op:

Goals:

1. Return to work, sport, or desired activities
2. Promote concept of prevention

Treatment:

1. Work/sport specific exercises
2. Work hardening
3. Gradual return to sport or desired activity

* Applies to athlete or laborer