

Preparing For and Recovering From Shoulder Arthroscopy

Thank you for choosing Palm Beach Hand to Shoulder for your care. I have put this information together with the patient scheduled for shoulder arthroscopy in mind. Please review carefully to ensure the best possible outcome

What is Shoulder Arthroscopy?

Shoulder arthroscopy is a minimally invasive procedure performed through several small incisions around the shoulder using a camera to visualize structures and special instruments to clean out, repair, or reconstruct injured or worn out structures.

What are the symptoms that can be helped by shoulder arthroscopy?

Shoulder pain that leads to activity limitation or sleep disruption

Pain when positioning the shoulder for activity above eye level, behind the back, across the body, or out to the side

Weakness of the shoulder

Feelings of giving way in the shoulder

Painful clicking, popping, or catching

What are the conditions that can be successfully treated with shoulder arthroscopy?

Rotator cuff tears

Labral tears

Biceps tendinitis

Bursitis (Subacromial Impingement)

Arthritis at the end of the collarbone (AC arthritis)

Shoulder separation or dislocation

What should I do to prepare for surgery?

Make alternative arrangements for transportation, dog walking, meal preparation, house cleaning and heavy chores. Pick out clothes that are easy to take on and off with limited use of one arm: oversized shirt that buttons down the front. pants with an elastic waist, shoes that are supportive and preferably without laces.

Unless otherwise instructed, hold any blood thinning medications for 5 days prior to surgery.

Do not eat or drink anything after midnight the night before surgery.

Take a shower the night before surgery and scrub your operative shoulder, neck, upper back, underarm, and chest wall with surgical soap (4% chlorhexidine gluconate) followed by wiping the same area with a cloth soaked in 3% hydrogen peroxide.

What can I expect when I wake up from surgery?

You will wake up from surgery with a sling on your operated arm. For the first 12-24 hours after surgery, you may have limited control of the operated arm owing to the regional anesthesia or “block” that temporarily numbs and paralyzes the arm for pain control.

How do I sleep after surgery?

Getting comfortable for sleeping can be challenging after shoulder surgery. Most patients recovering from shoulder surgery find it easiest to sleep in a recliner chair for up to several weeks after surgery. An alternative is to sleep propped up in bed with multiple supportive pillows. The sling should be on for sleeping.

Will I need pain medication?

Most patients will require prescription medication for a few days after the regional anesthetic block wears off. You should discontinue the prescription pain medication as soon as your symptoms allow you to do so, with a goal of discontinuing them at 2 weeks. Opioid medication can cause constipation. Walk in a climate controlled environment, stay hydrated, and eat a fiber-rich diet to avoid this problem. If your surgery involved repair of a rotator cuff tear, taking an anti-inflammatory to assist with pain is permissible for the first 72 hours after surgery. You should avoid long term use of anti-inflammatories for 3 months after surgery (ibuprofen, naproxen, meloxicam, celecoxib, diclofenac, etc) as these can compromise healing of the repaired tendon. Tylenol is ok.

How long do I have to be in a sling?

The answer to this depends on whether you are having a “clean up” or whether structures have to be repaired and/or reconstructed. Patients just having a debridement or “clean up” will be allowed gentle use of their shoulder within a few days of surgery.

If you are having surgery for rotator cuff repair, do not move your shoulder or discontinue the sling until I have instructed you to do so. Remain in the sling at all times except to shower or to periodically bring your hand to your face for eating, brushing teeth, shaving, typing, etc. (i.e. “hand-to-face” or tabletop activity). Your hand on the surgery side should remain in front of your face until instructed (wait for clearance from me before reaching out to the side or behind your back). When you are bathing you can bend forward at the hips and lower back and dangle your arm out of the sling to straighten out the elbow so it doesn't stiffen up on you and so that you can access your underarm while bathing.

How do I take care of the incisions?

The surgical bandage should be kept in place for at least 3 days after surgery. Each small incision should then be kept covered with fabric bandaids. Do not get the incisions wet until you see Dr. Diaz at 2 weeks after surgery. Avoid sweating as this can lead to wound infection.

Will I receive a cooling machine?

If you are interested in renting an ice machine that circulates ice water around your shoulder, please let my office know. Whether you use an ice machine or a reusable pack/gel pad, ice is an excellent means of reducing pain and swelling in the shoulder.

Will I need therapy?

Most people undergoing shoulder arthroscopy benefit from physical therapy. If you had a repair or reconstruction, the start of therapy will usually be 4-6 weeks after surgery.

When can I drive?

Criteria for resuming driving include no requirement for narcotic medication and discontinuation of the sling. You should ask Dr. Diaz before resuming driving after shoulder surgery.

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When can I return to work?

Patients with sedentary jobs may return to work as early as a few days after surgery with some modifications. Patients whose job entails heavy lifting, repetitive loading, or above eye level activity with the operated shoulder will require anywhere from 3-4 months off from work unless arrangements can be made for modified job responsibilities (i.e. supervisory, desk/office work).

When can I resume athletics?

This depends largely on the procedure performed and the type of sport. For arthroscopy without repair, I clear most patients for full athletic activity at 4-6 weeks, depending on the circumstances. If I performed a rotator cuff repair or other soft tissue reconstruction, it will be 3-5 months before you are allowed full athletic activity.

Please call the office or use the Patient Messaging Portal should you have any further questions.



Veronica A. Diaz, MD
Board Certified Orthopedic Surgeon