
REHABILITATION PROTOCOL (INFORMATION FOR PHYSIOTHERAPISTS)

REVERSE SHOULDER ARTHROPLASTY

1. General Guidelines

- This is a GENERAL rehabilitation protocol. Any SPECIFIC instructions that differ from this protocol should be followed (see below). For revision surgery, this protocol will often be delayed.
- Timelines are approximate. If the physiotherapist feels the patient is not ready for progression (due to pain, swelling, inadequate ROM or strength), the time line should be extended to suit the patient.
- In general, regaining ROM is the first (and most important) priority, followed by strengthening.
- Supervised physiotherapy begins 4-6 weeks post-op and continues for 3-6 months, as necessary, depending on patient's progress, activity level and goals.
- Patients are to be discharged after completion of all appropriate functional progressions and adequate performance on strength and functional tests.
- In addition to formal physiotherapy, patients should be encouraged to exercise independently 3-5 times/day during Phases I and II and 3-5 times per week during Phases III and IV.
- Functional Milestones – common functional activities the patient is expected to perform during each rehabilitation phase.
- Advancement Criteria – objective criteria used to judge whether or not a patient is ready for progression to the next phase of rehabilitation (see Rehabilitation Progression below).

2. General Precautions

- **No resisted internal rotation – for 12 weeks.**
- No pushing, pulling, or heavy lifting for at least 6 weeks.
- Long term: Limit forceful, jerking movements (i.e. starting outboard motor) and repetitive impact loading (i.e. chopping wood).
- Surgery Specific Precautions:
 - Revision Surgery: Delay entire protocol 4 weeks (i.e. sling at all times until 6 weeks post-op).

3. Rehabilitation Progression

- The following is a guideline for progression through the rehabilitation process.
- Progression is based on achieving advancement criteria for the next phase of rehabilitation and should take into account the patient's status and the surgeon's advisement.
- If the patient achieves the advancement criteria early, the physiotherapist may choose to advance the patient only AFTER 6 weeks post-op.
- If the patient does NOT meet the advancement criteria, extend the time in the current phase.
- If there is ANY uncertainty concerning the patient, please contact the surgeon.

4. Specific Instructions

PHASE I: Immediate Post-Op → 2 Weeks Post-Op

1. Objectives

- Protect the shoulder repair.
- Decrease post-op pain and swelling (can utilize Cryo-cuff for 8-12 hours/day x 2 weeks).
- Begin general activities of daily living (ADL's) (i.e. feeding, bathing, and dressing).
- Educate patient on rehabilitation progression.

2. Sling

- Should be worn at all times
- Patient to be taught proper removal and reapplication of sling.

3. Therapeutic Exercises

- Maintain perform hand-to-mouth activities in sling.
- Ice after exercise program x 15 min.
- NO pendulum or shoulder ROM exercises
- Wrist/elbow ROM.

4. Functional Milestones

- Proper removal and reapplication of sling.

5. Advancement Criteria for Phase II

- No active signs of inflammation.

PHASE II: 2 Weeks Post Op → 6 Weeks Post-Op

1. Objectives

- Protect the shoulder repair.
- Achieve full active-assisted ROM in all planes.
- Begin cross-training to maintain general fitness.
- Return to work: modified duties (avoid heavy lifting and overhead activity).

2. Sling

- May discontinue when sitting with arm at the side.
- Otherwise, should be worn at all times, except when under the supervision of the physiotherapist and when bathing.
- Should be worn for sleeping.

3. Therapeutic Exercises

- Maintain perform hand-to-mouth activities out of sling.
- Pendulum shoulder ROM exercises
- General fitness - may use stationary bike (arm MUST be kept in sling . . . NO weight bearing through arm).
- Begin peri-scapular muscle strengthening: postural work, scapular retraction, protraction, elevation and depression.
- Continue wrist/elbow ROM.

4. Functional Milestones

- Full active-assisted ROM – limits of forward elevation of 140° and external rotation of 40°.

5. Advancement Criteria for Phase III

- Full active-assisted – ROM limits of forward elevation of 140° and external rotation of 40°.

PHASE III: 6 Weeks Post Op → 12 Weeks Post-Op

1. Objectives

- Achieve full active ROM in all planes.
- Increase shoulder strength – particularly deltoid.
- Return to work: for manual and overhead occupations.

2. Sling

- May discontinue.

3. Therapeutic Exercises

- Begin active ROM and continue passive and active-assisted ROM exercises in all planes as necessary to achieve full ROM.
- Progressive deltoid strengthening exercises.
- Begin GENTLE isometric strengthening exercises.
- Begin manual glenohumeral and scapular mobilization.
- May begin aquatic shoulder therapy.
- Begin Theraband strengthening exercises, progressing to strengthening exercises with free weights for all planes. Increase repetitions before increasing weight (↑ endurance > ↑ strength).
- Begin overhead activity.
- Begin swimming to increase shoulder strength at low resistance.
- Begin putting and chipping for golf.
- General fitness - may begin running.
- May begin driving.

4. Functional Milestones

- Full active ROM.
- Full use of shoulder for daily activity.

5. Advancement Criteria for Phase IV

- Full use of shoulder for all general activity without pain.

PHASE IV: 12 Weeks Post-Op → 6 months Post Op

1. Objectives

- Maintain/improve shoulder ROM.
- Increase shoulder strength – particularly deltoid.
- Progressive return to sport.

2. Sling

- Already discontinued.

3. Therapeutic Exercises

- Continue ROM exercises – no limitations.
- Progressive deltoid strengthening exercises (likely required for up to 12 months post-op).
- Begin sport-specific strengthening exercises.
- Begin low speed throwing / controlled racket sports / non-contact hockey at 3 months.
- Progress to competitive throwing / racket sports / contact sports at 6 months.
- Progressive return to golf: begin with irons progressing to full swings with all clubs at 6 months.

4. Functional Milestones

- Full active ROM.
- Full use of shoulder for sporting activity.

References

- Bardana D, Rehabilitation Protocols, Queen’s University Sports Medicine.
- General Rehabilitation Guidelines, Bone and Joint Center, University of Washington Medical Center.