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Nonsurgical Rotator Cuff Tear Rehabilitation Guidelines

Acute Phase:

- Avoid all overhead use of involved shoulder
- Gentle mobilization and passive range of motion without pain
- Avoid all aggravating activities
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories

Subacute Phase:

- Active range of motion exercises below shoulder level
- Theraband and light resistive exercises with dumbbells below shoulder level
- Isometrics below shoulder level
- Focus strengthening on internal and external rotator cuff muscles and periscapular muscles
- Neck, elbow, wrist, and hand exercises should be included
- Progress to light above shoulder level exercises once strength improves below shoulder level

Strengthening Phase:

- Continue rotator cuff and periscapular strengthening exercises with therabands and dumbbells
- Increase resistance as strength improves
- Increase above shoulder exercises while avoiding all painful motions
- Begin strengthening muscles of the entire shoulder girdle including deltoid, pectoralis major, and latissimus dorsi muscles – Start with high repetitions (20 to 30) and low weights
- Begin sport specific/work specific activities

Criteria for Return to Full Activity:

- Full functional range of motion
- No pain or tenderness
- Good muscular strength
- Satisfactory clinical examination

Small Rotator Cuff Repair Rehabilitation Guidelines

Timeline

Weeks 1-4 post op

- NO Active shoulder range of motion (ROM) is to be performed
- Sling to be worn at all times, may remove to perform exercises
- Active and passive ROM of the neck, elbow and wrist (resisted exercises for elbow & wrist as tolerated)
- Home exercise program (HEP) should be performed 2-3 times daily
- Passive pendulum/Codman's exercises
- Gentle passive ROM/Pulleys can be added at 2 weeks (must guard from active motion)
- Gentle joint mobilizations
- Restore gleno-humeral joint mobility
- May begin core and scapular stabilization as tolerated
- Sling may be discontinued at 4 weeks

Weeks 4-8 post op

- Advance motion to full in all phases: active, active assistive and passive
- Begin isometric exercises
- Progress to active and active assisted range of motion
- Active ROM should be full at end of this period (Contact physician's office if not achieved)

Weeks 8-16 post op

- Continue exercises in previous phases
- Graduated rotator cuff strengthening exercises
- Advance isometric strengthening exercises
- Advance periscapular strengthening

4 months to 6 months post op

- Active rotator cuff and periscapular muscle strengthening exercises
- Begin gradual return to sports/activities/work duties as directed by physician
- Return to full sport activities as directed by physician

Criteria for Return to Full Activity

- Full Functional range of motion
- No pain or tenderness
- Satisfactory muscular strength
- Satisfactory clinical examination

Medium Rotator Cuff Repair Rehabilitation Guidelines

Timeline

Weeks 1-6 post op (PO)

- NO Active shoulder range of motion(ROM) is to be performed
- Sling to be worn at all times, may remove to perform exercises
- Active and passive range of motion of the neck, elbow and wrist (resisted exercises for elbow and wrist as tolerated)
- Home exercise program should be performed 2-3 times daily
- Passive pendulum/Codman's exercises
- Gentle passive ROM/Gentle joint mobilizations
- Restore gleno-humeral joint mobility
- May begin core and scapular stabilization as tolerated
- Sling may be discontinued at 4 weeks (Not Before)

Weeks 6-12 post op

- Continue all exercise in previous phases
- Begin isometric exercises
- Begin active assistive ROM
- Advance motion to full in all phases: active, active assistive and passive
- Active ROM should be full at end of this period(Contact physician's office if not achieved)

3 months to 5 months post op

- Continue exercises in previous phases
- Graduated Rotator cuff strengthening may begin once AROM is full
- Advance isometric strengthening exercises
- Advance periscapular strengthening

5 months to 8 months post op

- Active rotator cuff and periscapular muscle strengthening exercises
- Begin gradual return to sports/activities/work duties as directed by physician
- Return to full sport activities as directed by physician

Criteria for Return to Full Activity

- Full Functional range of motion
- No pain or tenderness
- Satisfactory muscular strength
- Satisfactory clinical examination

Large Rotator Cuff Repair Rehabilitation Guidelines

Timeline

Weeks 1-6 post op (PO)

- NO Active shoulder range of motion(ROM) is to be performed
- Sling to be worn at all times, may remove to perform exercises
- Active and passive ROM of the neck, elbow and wrist (resisted exercises for elbow & wrist as tolerated)
- Home exercise program should be performed 2-3 times daily
- Passive pendulum/Codman's exercises
- Gentle passive ROM/Gentle joint mobilizations
- May begin core and scapular stabilization as tolerated
- Sling may be discontinued at 6 weeks (Not Before)

Weeks 6-12 post op

- Continue all exercise in previous phases
- Begin isometric exercises
- Advance motion to full in all phases, active, active assistive and passive
- Progress to active and active assisted ROM
- Restore gleno-humeral joint mobility
- Active ROM should be full at end of this period (Contact physician's office if not achieved)

3 months to 6 months post op

- Continue exercises in previous phases
- Graduated Rotator cuff strengthening
- Advance isometric strengthening exercises
- Advance periscapular strengthening

6 months to 9 months post op

- Active rotator cuff and periscapular muscle strengthening exercises
- Begin gradual return to sports/activities/work duties as directed by physician
- Return to full sport activities as directed by physician

Criteria for Return to Full Activity

- Full Functional range of motion
- No pain or tenderness
- Satisfactory muscular strength
- Satisfactory clinical examination

Massive Rotator Cuff Repair Rehabilitation Guidelines

Timeline

Weeks 0-8 post op

- NO Active shoulder range of motion(ROM) is to be performed
- Sling to be worn at all times, may remove to perform exercises
- Active and passive ROM of the neck, elbow and wrist (resisted exercises for elbow & wrist as tolerated)
- Home exercise program should be performed 2-3 times daily
- Passive pendulum/Codman's exercises
- Gentle passive ROM/Gentle joint mobilizations
- Scapular retractions and elevation
- Sling may be discontinued at 8 weeks (Not Before)

2 months to 4 months post op

- Continue all exercise in previous phases
- Begin isometric exercises
- Advance motion to full in all phases, active, active assistive and passive
- Progress to active and active assisted ROM
- Active ROM should be full at end of this period (Contact physician's office if not achieved)

4 months to 6 months post op

- Continue exercises in previous phases
- Graduated Rotator cuff strengthening may begin once AROM is full
- Advance isometric strengthening exercises
- Advance periscapular strengthening

6 months to 9 months

- Active shoulder girdle, rotator cuff, and periscapular muscle strengthening exercises are the focus of this period with the emphasis to regain full strength

9 months to 12 months post op

- Begin gradual return to sports/activities/work duties as directed by physician
- Return to full sport activities as directed by physician

Criteria for Return to Full Activities

- Full Functional range of motion
- No pain or tenderness
- Satisfactory muscular strength
- Satisfactory clinical examination

