

Physical Therapy Protocol  
**Arthroscopic Rotator Cuff Repair**

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**Prior to Operation (If possible):**

Goals:

1. Learn limited shoulder protocol
2. Understand sling/pillow
3. Understand limitations and post-operative expectations.

**Phase 1: Day of Surgery - Day 7**

- Goals:
  1. Protect repair
  2. Control swelling and pain
  3. Maintain elbow, hand, and wrist range of motion
  
- Exercises:
  1. Active range of motion elbow, hand
  2. Limited shoulder protocol with pendulums out of sling

\*\*sling full time except for showering and exercises

**Phase 2: Weeks 2-6**

- Goals:
  1. Protect repair
  2. Maintain motion of elbow, hand, and wrist
  3. Avoid shoulder stiffness
  
- Exercises:
  1. Active range of motion elbow, hand, and wrist
  2. Pendulums out of sling
  3. Shoulder blade pinches
  4. Shoulder shrugs
  5. Week 3: may begin passive supine forward elevation  
    \*avoid combined forward elevation and internal rotation
  6. Week 3: may begin passive supine external rotation

**\*\*NO active shoulder motion until week 6\*\***

### **Phase 3: Weeks 6-12**

- Goals:
  1. Protect repair
  2. Regain full motion shoulder, elbow, hand, and wrist
  3. Discontinue sling
  
- Exercises:
  1. Active and active assist shoulder motion without restriction
  2. Passive shoulder motion without restriction
  3. Active motion elbow, hand, wrist
  4. Scapular stabilization / scapular setting exercises
  5. Pool therapy for range of motion if available (no resistance exercises allowed, just motion)

**\*\*NO Rotator Cuff Strengthening until week 12\*\***

### **Phase 4: Beginning week 12:**

- Goals:
  1. Protect repair until strength and motion is full
  2. Work or sport specific exercises
  3. Gradual progression rotator cuff strengthening and progressive strengthening of deltoid
  4. Progressive work hardening, gradual return to sport/work

### **General guiding principles:**

- It will take 3 months for the rotator cuff to heal well enough to begin strengthening.
- Modalities, as appropriate, are fine. However, no e-stim of rotator cuff or deltoid until week 12.
- Though protocols may be altered on an individual basis, in general, protecting the repair is the primary goal for the first 3 months. Stiffness is typically not a problem with arthroscopic rotator cuff repairs. In fact, some studies have suggested that return to normal range of motion within 6 weeks may correlate with higher re-tear rates.
- If there are any questions, please call my office. I am happy to discuss the progress of all my patients. Undoubtedly, when the patient, therapist, and surgeon are all on the same page...patients have greater success.

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