

ROTATOR CUFF TEARS

METROCREST ORTHOPAEDICS AND SPORTS MEDICINE

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You have been diagnosed as having injury or disease of the rotator cuff muscles. The rotator cuff involves 4 tendons of the shoulder but usually only 2 of the tendons are involved. The cuff is important in the elevation and centralization of the humeral head and also in the strength of the shoulder.

The Cuff tendons can be thought of similar to a rope. Similar to a rope the strands of the tendon may stretch, partially tear or fully tear. During each stage inflammation can occur leading to pain and weakness in the shoulder.

Treatment is divided into the non-operative and operative categories. The non-operative method is the initial treatment of choice in most individuals. This involves getting the pain controlled and strengthening the cuff muscles so the shoulder functions properly. This involves use of different medications (anti-inflammatory), occasional cortisone injections and therapy for the muscles to begin functioning properly. If the non-operative methods do not work then surgery may be indicated.

The surgical approach is a diagnostic shoulder arthroscopy and then either arthroscopic or operative repair of the cuff. Most repairs can be performed arthroscopically. The decision on which require a larger incision depends on the size and location of the tear as well as the quality of the patients tissues. This decision is made at the time of surgery.

The final outcome following surgery takes many months to determine. Generally the first 6 weeks the arm is used very little. At 6 weeks elevation of the arm occurs and at 10-12 weeks resistive exercises are begun. The result is not to expect raising your arm over head for 10 weeks or even minimal elevation with weights for 10-12 weeks. If you choose to have surgery you should inform your employer of these restrictions.

The best result possible may take up to a year to achieve. Not all shoulders that are treated with surgery are pain free. They do generally function better and certainly in most cases will be better in the long run then if no surgery was performed.

Please write down any questions and have them answered prior to surgery.