

ADVANTAGE THERAPY INDUSTRY UPDATE

June 2016

A Courtesy Publication for the Springfield area HR/Safety Community

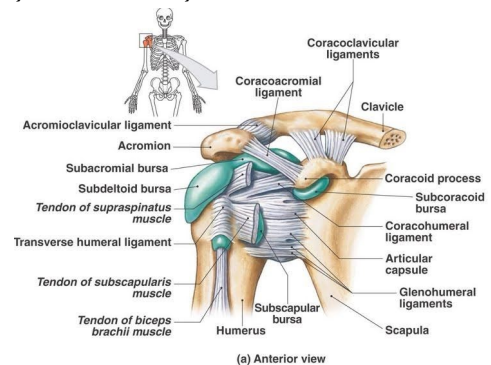
Rotator Cuff Rehab: What takes so long?

In last month's newsletter, we reviewed the shoulder anatomy and the differences between shoulder sprains & strains as well as several factors that can complicate work-related shoulder injuries (activities outside work, aging population, tobacco use, etc.).

Known as a "hot topic issue" in the work comp arena, rotator cuff tears can be a headache when it comes to determining causation. Compared to sprains & strains, rotator cuff tears are more complicated, more costly, and ultimately will take more time to heal.



Trent Moore, DPT has experience treating work-related rotator cuff injuries, both surgical and non-surgical cases. In this month's newsletter, Trent will break down the important shoulder anatomy, give an expected timeline for a typical rehab plan, and explain why this part of the body takes so long to heal.



Shoulders are complex

Take a look at the shoulder joint anatomy - an overwhelming amount of ligaments, muscles, and bursa sacs are packed into a small space, fighting each other for space to move. The shoulder is made for mobility, so it can move in many directions. This makes it more difficult to strengthen - compared to other joints, like the knee, that only moves in two directions.

No two shoulder injuries are the same, just like no two people are the same. Tissue health (among overall health) can vary greatly.

As noted in last month's newsletter, tobacco use has a huge impact on tissue health. A 2009 study by the Washington University School of Medicine, reveals that smoking may be an important risk factor in the development of rotator cuff disease. This study examined a group of 586 people with shoulder pain and no surgical history and found that 375 of these patients had a rotator cuff tear. When these 586 patients with shoulder pain were separated into "tear" vs. "no tear" groups, the rotator cuff tear group had a more prevalent history of smoking & smoking within the last 10 years, had a longer history of smoking, and smoked more per day (1.25 packs) compared to the category of patients with no cuff tear.

Conservative treatment can be a diagnostic tool

Rehabilitating healthy shoulder tissues after rotator cuff repair surgery can be expected to take 4-6 months. Employers should understand that the healing of unhealthy tissues (for example, tissues effected by tobacco use) can greatly lengthen the timeline.

It is important to note that conservative treatment can heal and/or diagnose a rotator cuff tear. Small rotator cuff tears can heal with a course of physical therapy, and strength and function will greatly improve. If not, the conservative treatment shows that a tear may be present and may require surgical intervention.

A 2014 study published in Bone and Joint Journal indicates that when it comes to the treatment of non-traumatic rotator cuff tears, PT alone produces results equal to those produced by arthroscopic surgery and open surgical repair. This study from Finland monitored the treatment of 173 patients, aged 55+ with supraspinatus tendon tears. Patients were divided into 3 treatment groups: PT only; acromioplasty (surgery to shave off bone) and PT; and rotator cuff tear, acromioplasty, and PT. All 173 patients were assessed using a common outcome measurement tool at 3 months, 6 months, and 1 year from the start of treatment.

Researchers found similar rates of improvement for all groups and were surprised to learn that surgical repair of a supraspinatus tear does not improve the outcome score - compared to acromioplasty only or PT only. According to the study, follow-ups of 167 shoulders treated show that "conservative treatment should be considered as the primary treatment for this condition."

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ROTATOR CUFF REHAB

Rehab timelines will vary

The severity of the tear, patient's health, patient's understanding and adherence to post-surgery restrictions, etc. will all determine the rehab timeline and return to full duty. Keep in mind, surgeons' protocols may vary. This is a general rehab timeline.



PT BEGINS:

1-4 WEEKS
POST-OP

WEAR SLING:

4-6 WEEKS WITH
NO ACTIVE MOTIONS

STRENGTHENING:

AT 6 WEEKS VERY LIGHT STRENGTHENING/
AROM BEGIN, MAY CONTINUE TO 6-12 WEEKS

FUNCTIONAL STRENGTHENING:

JOB TASK RELATED STRENGTHENING MAY
BEGIN AT 12 WEEKS, LASTING 1-2
MONTHS. WORK CONDITIONING MAY BE
NEEDED FOR PATIENTS RETURNING TO
HEAVY WORK.

The total rehab timeline in an ideal case would be 4-6 months, to return to previous level of function. FCE and Fit for Duty tests may be used to determine maximum medical improvement following rotator cuff repair surgery and rehab.

APPLYING THE RESEARCH IN A REAL-WORLD SCENARIO

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Patient is a 72 year-old male, working as a parts delivery driver. Job duties include driving, pulling orders, manually unloading and carrying parts.

Patient fell stepping down stairs, injuring the left shoulder.

Physician's diagnosis: Rotator cuff tear, detected by MRI

Patient's symptoms: Pain, stiffness, and weakness following rotator cuff repair surgery

Prior treatments: None

An orthopedic surgeon referred this patient to Advantage Therapy for post-operative care following a rotator cuff repair.

Take a look at the rehab timeline for this patient:

5 weeks after injury - Rotator cuff repair surgery

2 weeks after surgery - Start physical therapy

6 weeks after surgery - Patient out of sling, start Active Range of Motion

8 weeks after surgery - Start light strengthening, with resistance bands and 1-2 lb. weights

8+ weeks after surgery - Continue physical therapy to restore functional strength, activity tolerance, and the ability to perform job tasks.

5 months after injury - Patient is completely satisfied with 95% improvement in shoulder pain and function, is released by surgeon, and returns to full duty 6 months after the injury.

As mentioned before, this rehab timeline is longer due to the patient's age, which can be a factor affecting tissue health.

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