

POST-OPERATIVE REHABILITATION PROTOCOL

Rotator Cuff Repair — Large / Massive Tear

William McLaughlin, MD | Sports Medicine Surgery | Advanced Bone & Joint

Phase 1 | 1-6 Weeks

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Sling immobilization.
- Maintain elbow, wrist, hand active ROM.
- True passive (only) shoulder ROM — NO active motion.
- Goal supine elevation in scapular plane 140°; emphasize ER (minimum 40°).
- Begin scapular stabilization and submaximal deltoid isometrics as ROM improves.
- No pulley/canes until 6 weeks post-op.

Immobilization

- Sling immobilization.

Range of Motion

- Active ROM to elbow, wrist, hand.
- True passive (ONLY) shoulder ROM — NO active motion.
- Pendulums.
- Supine elevation in scapular plane to 140°.
- External rotation to tolerance with arm at side (emphasize ER, minimum goal 40°).

Strengthening

- Scapular stabilization (sidelying).
- Deltoid isometrics in neutral (submaximal) as ROM improves.

Precautions

- No pulley/canes until 6 weeks post-op.

Phase 2 | 6-12 Weeks

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Discontinue sling.
- Begin AAROM and advance to AROM as tolerated.
- Defer internal rotation / behind back until 6 weeks; begin to tolerance thereafter.
- Light end-range stretching.
- Continue cuff isometrics with arm at side.

Immobilization

- Discontinue sling.

Range of Motion

- Begin AAROM and advance to AROM as tolerated.
- Elevation in scapular plane and external rotation to tolerance.
- No internal rotation or behind back until 6 weeks post-op — after, may begin to tolerance.
- Light stretching at end ranges.

Strengthening

- Cuff isometrics with arm at side.

Conditioning

- Upper-body ergometer.

Phase 3 | 3-12 Months

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Advance to full ROM as tolerated with passive end-range stretching.
- Advance strengthening: isometrics → bands → light weights (1-5 lbs); 8-12 reps / 2-3 sets per rotator cuff, deltoid, scapular stabilizers.
- Limit strengthening to 3x/week.
- Begin eccentrics, plyometrics, proprioception.
- Sports rehab at 4.5 months; throwing at 6 months; mound at 9 months; collision at 9 months.
- MMI usually at 12 months.

Range of Motion

- Advance to full ROM as tolerated with passive stretching at end ranges.

Strengthening

- Advance strengthening as tolerated: isometrics and bands, light weights (1-5 lbs); 8-12 reps / 2-3 sets per rotator cuff, deltoid, scapular stabilizers.

- Strengthening 3x/week to avoid rotator cuff tendonitis.
- Begin eccentrically resisted motions, plyometrics, proprioception (body blade).

Return to Sport Milestones

- Sports-related rehab at 4.5 months, including advanced conditioning.
- Return to throwing at 6 months.
- Throw from pitcher's mound at 9 months.
- Collision sports at 9 months.
- MMI usually at 12 months post-op.

This protocol is a general guideline. Progression is patient-specific and at the discretion of William McLaughlin, MD.