POST-OPERATIVE REHABILITATION PROTOCOL

Total Shoulder Arthroplasty

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

Phase 1 | 0-6 Weeks

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Sling immobilization at all times except for home exercise program and hygiene.
- Home exercise program only — no formal outpatient therapy this phase.
- Restore active forward elevation.
- Restore active external rotation.
- Protect the repair — no passive stretching, no strengthening.

Immobilization

- Sling immobilization for the first 6 weeks post-operatively.

Range of Motion

- Home exercise program only, performed 3 times daily — no formal outpatient PT visits during this phase.
- Active forward elevation:
  - Pulleys.
  - Wall climbs.
  - Table slides.
- Active external rotation exercises.
- No passive stretching or passive range of motion during this phase.

Strengthening

- None. Do not begin strengthening exercises during this phase.

Precautions & Modalities

- Five-pound lifting restriction.
- Heat before exercises, ice after, as needed.

Phase 2 | 6-12 Weeks

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Begin formal outpatient therapy.
- Progress from active-assisted motion to passive stretching.
- 6-week goal: 120° forward elevation / 30° external rotation.
- 12-week goal: 150° forward elevation / 45° external rotation.
- No external rotation stretching, internal rotation, or extension yet.

Range of Motion

- Begin gentle active-assisted motion at 6 weeks, progressing to passive stretching.
- Range of motion goals:
  - 6 weeks: 120° forward elevation, 30° external rotation.
  - 12 weeks: 150° forward elevation, 45° external rotation.
- No external rotation passive stretching until 12 weeks post-operatively.
- No internal rotation or extension for the first 12 weeks post-operatively.

Strengthening

- Do not begin strengthening until 12 weeks post-operatively.
- Continue 5-pound lifting restriction through 12 weeks.

Precautions

- Do not reach behind the back into internal rotation.
- No lifting more than 5 lbs.
- Do not use the operative arm to push off (e.g., from a chair or bed).

Phase 3 | 12 Weeks and Beyond

GOALS FOR THIS PHASE

- Begin strengthening program.
- Progress isometrics → resistance bands → light weights.
- Discontinue lifting restriction.
- Return to light athletic activity at 3 months, heavier activity at 6 months.

Range of Motion

- Continue progressing passive stretching, now including external rotation, internal rotation, and extension.
- Advance toward full, symmetric shoulder range of motion.

Strengthening

- Begin strengthening at 12 weeks post-operatively: isometrics progressing to resistance bands, then light weights.
- Focus on the scapular stabilizers, rotator cuff, and deltoid.

Return to Activity Milestones

- Light athletic activities at 3 months if full range of motion has been recovered.
- Heavier athletic activities at 6 months.

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