The Pre-Operative Guide to

SHOULDER SURGERY

Premier
ORTHOPAEDIC & SPORTS MEDICINE

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# THE PRE-OPERATIVE GUIDE TO SHOULDER SURGERY

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If you are experiencing pain in your shoulders, arms, or upper back, you may have a shoulder injury. Shoulder pain can be a major indicator of several different types of problems. Many shoulder injuries occur from overuse stemming from the upper extremity and repetitive activities due to certain sports or occupational tasks.

The shoulder is the most flexible joint in the body and allows your arm to move in many different directions. This flexibility also means the joint is very vulnerable. Because the shoulder socket is smaller than the ball of the upper arm, the joint is particularly susceptible to injury.

In some instances, shoulder injuries can be resolved by physical therapy, but others require surgery. This may be the only option to completely heal your shoulder and regain your full range of motion. Depending on your specific situation, there are different types of surgeries to consider for repairing a shoulder injury.

This e-book will provide you with everything you need to know about shoulder pain and injury, types of shoulder surgery, essential questions to ask a surgeon, and recovery. Being as informed as possible will help you make the right decision about your surgery options and make the process go smoothly.
UNDERSTANDING SHOULDER PAIN
COMMON SHOULDER PROBLEMS THAT REQUIRE SURGERY

There are many kinds of shoulder pain, but understanding the different types of injuries that occur can help you identify the problem you are experiencing. Properly conveying this information to your doctor will help you receive a correct diagnosis and the best care.

Bursitis or Tendonitis
This problem occurs when repetitive activities cause overuse of the joint. These activities cause rubbing or pinching of the rotator cuff under the acromion and in the acromioclavicular joint. Irritation of the tendons, or bursae, creates inflammation that causes pain.

Impingement and Partial Rotator Cuff Tears
Partial thickness tears damage the tendon without completely severing it. These tears can be associated with chronic inflammation and the development of spurs on the underside of the acromion. In many cases, surgery is needed to remove the spurs and repair the tendon.
Full Thickness Rotator Cuff Tears
This is when the tissue is completely torn and there is a gap between the tendon and the humeral head of the shoulder. Full thickness rotator cuff tears occur most often when the joint is overused or the rotator cuff is already partially torn. They can also be caused by heavy lifting or falls.

Non-operative treatment with activity modification, physical therapy, and anti-inflammatory medication may be successful in some cases. However, surgery is often required if pain and weakness continue.

Instability
Instability, also known as shoulder dislocation, occurs when the head of the upper arm bone is forced out of the shoulder socket. This is most often caused by sudden injury or overuse of the shoulder ligaments. A partial dislocation is called a subluxation, which occurs when the head of the upper arm is forced out of the shoulder socket only slightly.

Osteoarthritis and Rheumatoid Arthritis
These conditions can cause destruction of the shoulder joint and surrounding tissue, as well as degeneration and tearing of the capsule or rotator cuff. When conservative treatments fail, a shoulder replacement may be necessary. This is recommended for patients with painful shoulders and limited motion. The treatment options are either a hemiarthroplasty which replaces the humeral head, or a total shoulder arthroplasty that replaces both the ball and socket.
WHEN IT’S TIME TO CONSULT A SHOULDER SURGEON

It’s critical to consult a surgeon if you are experiencing shoulder pain because it is very common for shoulder injuries to get worse if not treated right away. Early treatment of shoulder injury prevents serious problems from occurring down the road. If you have experienced any of the following, surgery may be necessary, and you should consult a surgeon as soon as possible:

- You felt a tear in your shoulder
- You have significant weakness or loss of motion
- You experienced an injury, such as falling on your shoulder
- Your symptoms have persisted for six months or longer
TYPES OF SHOULDER SURGERY AND SURGICAL PROCEDURES

During your initial consultation with your surgeon, he or she will most likely be able to tell what type of shoulder surgery would be required based on the pain, weakness, and range of motion restrictions you’re experiencing. Having an understanding of the most common types of shoulder surgery and shoulder procedures will help you have a productive and informative conversation with your doctor.

Shoulder surgery could involve either a repair or replacement. The following are the most common types of surgeries:

**Rotator Cuff Repair**
Depending on the severity of the rotator cuff tear, a surgeon will perform either an arthroscopy or an open surgery to repair the tendon. The surgeon will first examine the shoulder joint with a tiny camera. Then they remove bursa, diseased tissue and bone spurs if necessary to ensure that the rotator cuff has enough space and is not pinched. The last step is to sew the torn edges of the tendon together and attach it to the top of the humerus. Some tears are worse than others and the severity will determine your recovery time.
Total Shoulder Replacement
The shoulder is a ball-and-socket joint, and when both the ball and socket lose their cartilage covering, the patient will notice pain, stiffness, and grinding and would be a candidate for a total shoulder replacement. During this procedure, the damaged bone and cartilage are replaced with a metal ball implant that fits down the center of the arm bone. The socket portion of the joint is then shaved down and replaced with a plastic socket attached to the scapula. Because this surgery replaces bone and cartilage, recovery time will last anywhere from 6-12 weeks. Patient activities will be restricted during the recovery period.

Partial Shoulder Replacement
A patient will undergo this procedure when only the ball of the shoulder joint is damaged or the patient is too young and active to undergo resurfacing of the socket. The humeral head is replaced with a metal ball implant which fits down the center of the arm bone. During this surgery, less bone is removed compared to a total replacement surgery, a plastic socket is not inserted and the incision is smaller.

Labral Repair
If you suffer frequent dislocations of your shoulder, you may need labral repair. Soft tissue surrounds the bone in the shoulder socket to prevent dislocation. When dislocation does occur, this gasket typically becomes torn away from the socket. Labral repair involves placing small absorbable anchors into the shoulder socket. This creates compression in the shoulder and promotes healing. Recovery will take 3-4 months.
**Bicep Tenodesis**
Bicep tendonitis often occurs after overuse of the tendon, typically after a lifetime of performing overhead activities. When nonsurgical treatments such as ice, rest, or steroid injections don’t work, bicep tenodesis surgery is required. This procedure is usually performed arthroscopically but is sometimes also combined with a rotator cuff repair. The surgeon will evaluate the injured bicep tendon then reattach the healthy part to the arm bone. Most patients will see a full recovery within 8-12 weeks.

Depending on the type of shoulder surgery, your surgeon will likely recommend one of the following surgical procedures in order to provide you with the best results possible:

**Arthroscopy**
This is when a surgeon inserts a pencil-thin camera with a small lens and lighting system, called an arthroscope, into tiny incisions to see inside your shoulder joint. Images from inside the joint are relayed to a monitor that your surgeon uses to guide miniature surgical instruments to repair your injury. This is the least invasive surgery because the incisions are very small and will result in minimal pain and stiffness.

**Open Surgery**
Open surgery is a relatively invasive procedure where small incisions a few inches long are made and the surgeon exposes the injury to repair it. When an injury is too large to complete with an arthroscopy, surgeons have to open up the shoulder. This procedure requires a significant amount of recovery time and it will be approximately 3-4 months until the tendon is healed. However, a full recovery can take up to 6 months.
EVALUATING SURGEONS
THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK

When looking for an experienced orthopaedic surgeon to perform your shoulder surgery, it's important to find the right surgeon for you. There are many things you will want to know before your surgery, and the surgeon should take enough time to speak with you until all your questions are answered and you feel comfortable about the procedure.

Find out how many shoulder surgeries the surgeon has performed and how well his patients have recovered. When talking to a surgeon, ask questions such as: What are my anesthesia options? Where will the surgery be performed? What can I expect from the surgery? What will my recovery time be? When considering your options, it’s important to learn as much information as you can about the surgery itself.
After you consult with one surgeon, be sure to get a second opinion. If you get two opinions that are almost identical, you should feel more confident about the first recommendation. If the opinions are quite different, you must consider what makes the most sense for you and your needs so that you can have confidence in the treatment you choose.

A very important aspect of choosing a surgeon is meeting him or her in person. Meeting with a surgeon will help you gauge his personality and see how well you connect. You will want to work with someone whom you trust and know that your well-being is their top priority.

**PREPARING FOR SHOULDER SURGERY**

It is very important to understand that your mobility will be limited after shoulder surgery. To reduce the risk of injuring the joint all over again, you must avoid moving your shoulder and arm at all costs. The surgery will have a great impact on your daily life, so you should prepare your home before the surgery to make the transition afterward as easy as possible.

**Practice Using Your Opposite Arm**

Shoulder injuries primarily occur on the dominant arm, since that is the arm being used most frequently. One of the most beneficial ways to prepare for your surgery is to get accustomed to using your other arm. Practice doing daily tasks while keeping your dominant hand in your pocket or behind your back. This will allow you to get a feel for how you will go about your new routine after surgery.
Eating
You will not be able to cook meals when recovering from surgery. Prepare meals that can be eaten with one hand ahead of time and make sure all lids and covers can be easily removed. Cutting food into portions beforehand will also be helpful, or consider using tools such as a rocker knife to make eating easier. Remember that you will be recovering from surgery and will need to be healthy and avoid dehydration. Prepare foods that are rich in grains, fiber, fruits, and vegetables. It’s also very important to avoid drinks that contain caffeine or alcohol. You may want to ask a friend or family member to help prepare meals for you.

Sleeping
Even simple tasks like sleeping can be difficult after shoulder surgery. If your bed is too high to comfortably get in and out of, you may need to use a step stool or choose to make up a bed on a low couch. You may opt to sleep in a chair or a recliner if it feels more comfortable to you. Some post-operative patients choose to rent a reclining lift chair for the days after surgery. This chair reclines and enables you to sleep comfortably. It also has the ability to lift you into a standing position, something that you may find difficult with only one arm.
Bathing
Bathing and using the toilet are tasks that may be challenging without your dominant arm. The best way to make things easier is to practice using your washcloth and toilet paper with your opposite arm before surgery. If necessary, there are tools that can help make these tasks easier.

Dressing
Be sure to have clean clothes ready that are easy to get on and off with one hand. Slip-on shoes and athletic clothing, such as sweatshirts and sweatpants that are a size larger, will make the process easier. Shirts with zippers or buttons may be the best choice since you won’t be able to lift your arm. Always dress your surgical arm first to ensure the least amount of movement.

Working
If your job requires physical activity using both hands, you will be out of work temporarily. If you primarily work on a computer, you may want to look into software that can type words as you speak them. Utilizing a speech recognition program will make creating documents easier than typing with only your non-dominant hand. You will want to practice using the program prior to surgery, as it may take some time getting used to. It will also be helpful to practice writing with your non-dominant hand ahead of time so you will be prepared after the surgery.
WHAT TO EXPECT THE DAY OF SHOULDER SURGERY

Typically, doctors will advise you not to eat or drink anything after midnight the night before the surgery. When you get to the hospital, your nurse will have you change into a hospital gown and prepare you for surgery by cleaning your shoulder and starting an intravenous line.

Anesthesia

You will also meet with an anesthesiologist to review the plan for your anesthesia during surgery. They will make sure you’re comfortable with the final plan and answer any questions you may have. Depending on what kind of anesthesia you have selected, you will receive it via intravenous line, injection, or inhalation.

Incision

If you undergo an arthroscopy, your surgeon will create a few small incisions at the site of the injury in order to place the camera lens in your shoulder and perform the repair. For an open surgery, your surgeon will create a longer incision to expose the injury and repair it.
SURGERY RECOVERY

The most important thing to remember when you are out of surgery is: only move your shoulder within the limits that your surgeon prescribes. After surgery, your shoulder is very sensitive and it is very possible to reinjure it. Rely only on your opposite hand and be very careful of your surgical arm and shoulder. Get lots of rest while your shoulder heals and focus on eating a balanced diet.

Wearing a Sling
Depending on how invasive your shoulder surgery was, you may or may not be given a sling to wear. A sling will immobilize your arm for as long as you are instructed to wear it, which is typically about 4-6 weeks.

Ice
Your surgeon may suggest applying ice to your shoulder to minimize swelling and reduce pain. Icing the site for 15-20 minutes every two hours will control the swelling. Be sure to place a towel between the ice and the skin.

Pain Medication
It is likely that your doctor will prescribe pain medication such as narcotics after your surgery. Remember to drink plenty of water with your pain medication and never take pain medication on an empty stomach. Notify your surgeon if you experience nausea or itching.
Infection

Be sure to provide care for your incisions according to your doctor's instructions. Infections are rare but may occur after surgery. It is important to be on the lookout for the following signs of infection around your incisions to prevent serious illness:

- Increased swelling and redness
- Increased drainage or discharge which changes color or has an odor
- Increased pain not associated with exercise
- Surrounding skin that is hot to the touch
- Fever greater than 100.5 °F or night sweats

In the event that you do experience any of these symptoms, call your doctor or surgeon right away. They will be able to advise you on how to treat your symptoms to reduce the risk of greater infection.
CONCLUSION

Choosing to have shoulder surgery is a very important decision, but it may be the only option you have to relieve your pain and regain motion in your shoulder. Be sure to consult a surgeon if you are having severe or consistent pain in your shoulder to avoid making the injury worse. It is important to do your research and find the best surgeon for you and your specific situation. Do not hesitate to ask any questions you may have regarding the surgery and recovery.

If you, or a loved one, are experiencing shoulder pain and considering surgery, click here to contact Premier Orthopaedics or to schedule a consultation.