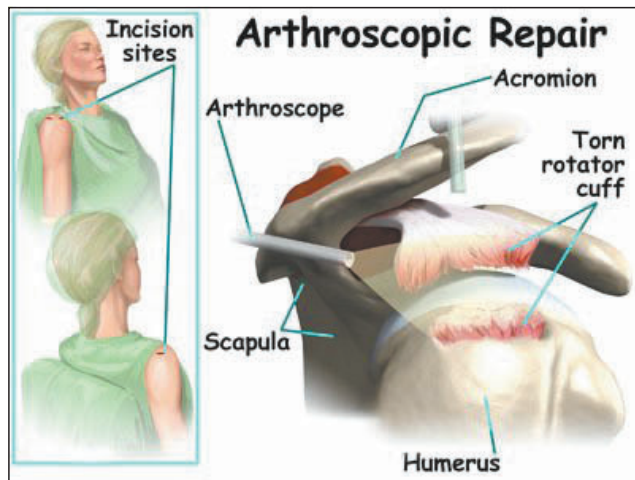


Tiny incisions equal big success with arthroscopic shoulder surgery



By Augustine H. Conduah, MD

DeKalb Medical Physicians
Stonecrest Orthopedics and Sports Medicine

Rotator cuff injury is the most common problem that a shoulder surgeon treats, and middle-aged adults and elders seem to get them more than anyone else. Many advances in the diagnosis and care of this disease have been made over the past 15 years.

What is the rotator cuff?

The rotator cuff consists of four muscles that start from the scapula or shoulder blade and are attached to the humerus or upper arm bone or by tendons. The muscles of the rotator cuff surround the shoulder joint and help to hold the joint in place and provide stability while lifting one's arm and during movements such as swinging a golf club.

What are the symptoms of a rotator cuff tear?

People who have a rotator cuff tear often complain of pain and weakness in their shoulder and at the side of their arm. The pain creeps up during intense activity or while at rest and at night. These symptoms usually start off as mild then get worse over time. Both the size and location of the tear can determine the amount of discomfort experienced.

What causes rotator cuff tears?

Most often, rotator cuff tears result from

repetitive or strenuous activities. For example, athletes and workers who perform the same task repeatedly develop inflammation in their rotator cuff. Overuse and inflammation may lead to weakness. Furthermore, with a weak rotator cuff, a tear may develop over time or at an instant from a simple activity like lifting a suitcase. You can also tear your rotator cuff from a fall or a direct blow to your shoulder. A weak rotator cuff can be more at risk to being pinched and eventually torn by bone spurs. Age is another factor in rotator cuff disease. With aging, muscles and tendons get weaker because of a decrease in the blood supply that provides nutrients to these tissues. Over time, the rotator cuff can break down and become torn, leading to pain in the shoulder.

How is a rotator cuff tear diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask you questions about your shoulder pain and will examine your shoulder for tenderness and weakness. An X-ray is often taken to rule out other conditions such as a fracture, a bone spur, or arthritis. In addition, an MRI is a valuable tool in diagnosing rotator cuff tears. Unlike an X-ray, an MRI shows muscles, tendons, and ligaments, as well as bones. What's more, an MRI shows the size and exact location of a rotator cuff tear.

What is the treatment for rotator cuff tears?

The initial treatment of rotator cuff disease involves rest, anti-inflammatory medications and physical therapy. Your doctor may also inject Cortisone to the injured area. As you may know, Cortisone is a powerful anti-inflammatory medication.

But if nonsurgical treatments are unsuccessful, your doctor may recommend surgery. Traditionally, rotator cuff tears have been repaired through larger incisions on the shoulder. However, newer, less-invasive methods of rotator cuff repair are available. Rotator cuff tears can now be performed arthroscopically through a camera placed in the joint. In fact, arthroscopy can sometimes provide a better view of the rotator cuff.

Shoulder arthroscopy usually involves three small poke holes, the size of a pen, in your shoulder. One opening is for the tiny, fiber optic camera and the others are for the special instruments. Through these small incisions, the surgeon stitches the rotator cuff tendon back to bone. At the same time, bone



Healthy Living Tip

Obesity is a major epidemic in America. It can lead to diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and even arthritis. There are several practical ways of avoiding and overcoming

obesity:

- First, knowing your percentage of body fat and Body Mass Index (BMI) will provide a reliable way of knowing whether your weight is within a healthy range. You can calculate your BMI can be found on the Internet at <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/> or ask your doctor to calculate it for you.
 - It's also important to avoid popular fad diets. These diets will cause an unstable pattern of weight loss and weight gain.
 - Keep things in perspective- three to five pounds of weight loss per month can equal more than 50 pounds a year.
 - Next, make time for yourself and walk, run, swim, or bike at least 30 minutes a day three to four times a week.
 - Eat smaller portions and learn how to read food labels in order to understand your total intake of fat, fiber, and essential vitamins and minerals.
 - Finally, it's important that you set your own goals, and don't compare yourself to anyone.
- Remember, always consult your doctor first before starting any exercise program or dramatically changing your diet.

spurs can also be shaved down and inflamed tissues removed.

After arthroscopic surgery, you can go home the same day. Your shoulder is placed in a sling for protection for several weeks, and a physical therapist will start you on a routine of safe, easy exercises to strengthen your shoulder, and progress them based on your body's response as time goes by.

Rotator cuff tears can be quite disabling. But the good news is that arthroscopic surgery offers a minimally invasive treatment, providing quicker recovery and great success rates.