

This document will give you information about shoulder surgery (rotator cuff). If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is the rotator cuff?

The rotator cuff is formed from four muscles and tendons that attach your arm to the top of your shoulder blade (see figure 1). Impingement or a tear are the usual types of damage that can happen to the rotator cuff.

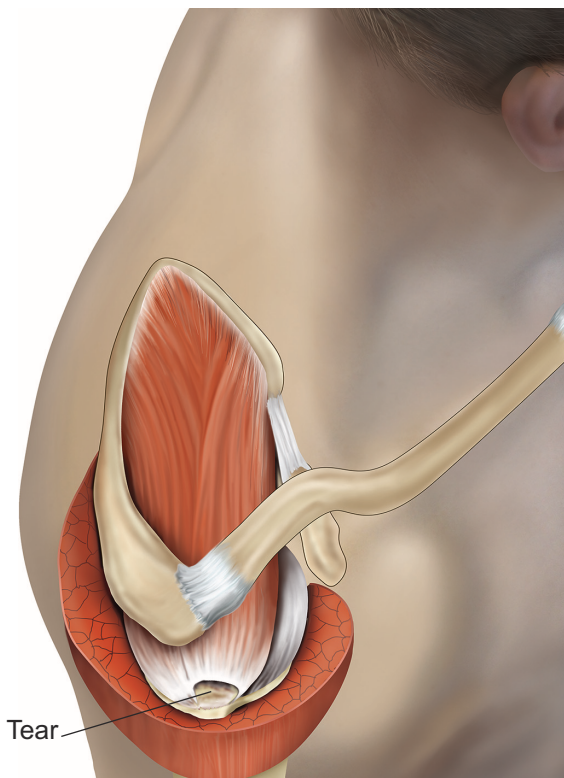


Figure 1

A tear in the rotator cuff

What are the benefits of surgery?

You should get less pain and be able to use your shoulder more easily.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Most people with impingement or a small tear can get back good function in their shoulder by changing their activities, and with the help of exercises and physiotherapy.

Simple painkillers such as paracetamol and anti-inflammatory painkillers such as ibuprofen can also help.

A steroid and local-anaesthetic injection into your shoulder can sometimes reduce pain.

If you have a large tear, it is likely that surgery is your only option to get back some strength in your shoulder.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is usually performed under a general anaesthetic but various anaesthetic techniques are possible. The operation usually takes 45 minutes to an hour.

Impingement is usually treated by an arthroscopy (keyhole surgery). Your surgeon will use instruments to remove any thickened tissue, release any tight tissue and to shave off some bone.

Your surgeon may also be able to repair rotator-cuff tears using keyhole surgery. However, they may need to use open surgery. They will use stitches that anchor into the bone.

What complications can happen?

1 General complications

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Unsightly scarring

2 Specific complications

- Bleeding into your shoulder
- Restricted shoulder movement
- Infection in your shoulder
- Blood clot
- Severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of your arm and hand (complex regional pain syndrome)
- Damage to nerves
- The rotator cuff tearing again or the tear failing to heal

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home the same day. Any stitches or clips are usually removed after one to two weeks.

It can take up to a year to get back enough strength in your shoulder to return to normal activities.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

You may not get back the same strength that you had before you damaged your shoulder.

Summary

Rotator-cuff problems can cause pain and weakness in your shoulder. An operation can help to reduce any pain and get back some strength in your shoulder.

Acknowledgements

Author: Prof Lennard Funk MSc FRCS (Tr. & Orth.)

Illustrations: Medical Illustration Copyright ©

Medical-Artist.com

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.