

## Physical Therapy Protocol Rotator Cuff Repair: Small and Medium Tears

Patient Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Diagnosis: \_\_\_\_\_

Surgery: \_\_\_\_\_ Surgery Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**If Subscapularis repair: Shoulder external rotation in scapular plane limited to 30° x 6 weeks**  
**No shoulder external rotation at 90° abduction x6 weeks**  
**No subscapularis/Internal Rotation strengthening x 9 weeks**

### Phase I - Protective Phase (Weeks 0 - 6)

#### Goals:

- Protect integrity of repair.
- Gradual increase in PROM
- Gradual increase in shoulder strength
- Decrease pain and inflammation.

#### Precautions:

- Wear brace/sling at all times except when performing prescribed exercises + hygiene.
- No lifting of objects at all.
- No excessive shoulder extension or behind back motions.
- No sudden movements or stretching.
- No supporting of body weight or pushing up from sitting using operative arm.

#### **Weeks 0 - 2:**

- Sling/swathe for 6 weeks with the abduction pillow.
- Perform elbow/hand/wrist ROM exercises.
- NO PASSIVE ROM (PROM) OF SHOULDER X 6 WEEKS except pendulums.
- NO STRENGTHENING at all.
- Pain control modalities

#### **Weeks 3 - 4:**

- Start PROM to tolerance
  - Flexion with goal to 90 degrees, but may be limited due to pain
  - ER/IR in scapular plane
- Encourage safe home exercise program

#### **Weeks 5 - 6:**

- Continue PROM and GENTLE stretching with goal of full PROM if pain allows.
  - Flexion to 145°
  - ER/IR to 45° in scapular plane
- AAROM (start around Week 6 if can tolerate):
  - Flexion to 120°
  - ER/IR to tolerance in scapular plane.
  - ER/IR to 30° at 90° abduction.
- Encourage safe home exercise program.

## **Phase II - Intermediate Phase (Weeks 7 - 12)**

### Goals:

- Full, nonpainful Active and Passive ROM by 12 weeks.
- Gradual improvement in strength and power
- Gradual return to light functional activities
- Encourage safe home exercise program

### **Weeks 7 - 10:**

- Discontinue brace or sling
- Maintain full PROM and progress to full AAROM.
- AAROM:
  - Flexion to tolerance.
  - ER/IR to tolerance in scapular plane.
  - ER/IR to tolerance at 90° abduction.
- AROM:
  - Flexion to 90°.
- Strengthening (Start at week 7):
  - Tubing ER @ 0° abduction.
  - Isotonics (light):
    - Prone rows to neutral arm position.
    - Prone horizontal abduction.
    - Bicep curls (1 pound weight maximum).
- Strengthening (start at week 8-9):
  - Rhythmic Stabilization drills.
    - Flexion/Extension at 90-100° of flexion in supine.
    - ER/IR in scapular plane
  - Sub-maximal/pain-free isometrics (all with bent elbow):
    - Flexion/bicep
    - Abduction
    - ER/IR
    - Extension

### **Weeks 10 -12:**

- Maintain full AAROM and progress to full AROM.
- Strengthening:
  - Continue/progress rhythmic stabilization drills.
  - Continue tubing ER at 0° abduction working on endurance.
  - Tubing scapular strengthening to neutral working on endurance.
  - Isotonics (gradually progress resistance):
    - Flexion to 90° (no resistance until AROM is without hiking).
    - ER/IR in side lying.
    - Prone rows.
    - Prone horizontal abduction.
    - Biceps/triceps.

### **Phase III - Advanced Strengthening Phase (13 - 20 Weeks)**

#### Goals:

- Maintain full, non-painful ROM.
- Improve strength of general shoulder/periscapular musculature.
- Improve neuromuscular control.
- Gradual return to all functional activities.

#### **Weeks 13-16:**

- Maintain full PROM/AAROM/AROM
- Perform self-capsular stretches if motion is tight.
- Encourage home exercise program
- Strengthening:
  - Continue isotonic/tubing and stabilization strengthening
  - Closed chain stabilization drills

#### **Weeks 16 - 20:**

- Advanced Strengthening program (at 16 weeks or earlier if tolerated): Continue isotonic/tubing and stabilization strengthening.
  - High-speed isokinetics for ER/IR in neutral ( 16 weeks).
  - Begin general shoulder strengthening with precautions (Gradual as tolerated):
    - Latissimus pulls with narrow grip and arms in front of body.
    - Chest press with light dumbbells keeping elbows anterior to shoulder.
    - Machine rows.
    - Military press with light dumbbells and arms in front only.
- Plyometric program (2 handed → 1 handed) at 16 weeks if tolerated

### **Phase IV -Return to Activity Phase (Weeks 21 - 26 and beyond)**

#### Goals:

- Maintain shoulder ROM, strength and neuromuscular control.
- Gradual return to recreational sport activities.
- Gradual return to strenuous occupational activities.

#### **Weeks 21 - 24:**

- Continue flexibility, strength, stabilization and plyometric exercises.
- Isokinetic strength test for ER/IR in neutral at 180°/ sec and 300°/sec.
- Initiate interval sport program if appropriate.

#### **Weeks 24 - 28:**

- Continue flexibility, strength, stabilization and plyometric exercises.
- Continue with interval sport program and progress to return to sport when released.