

SHOULDER REPLACEMENT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When will I be able to drive?

We recommend that patients do not drive for 2-4 weeks after surgery. In order to return to driving, you must no longer be taking narcotic pain medication and you must feel you are able to drive safely, without putting yourself or anyone else at risk.

What is the difference between a standard replacement and a reverse?

Standard (anatomic): the arthritic head, or ball, at the top of your arm is replaced with a metal ball. A plastic liner is placed in the socket.

Reverse: The joint is flipped around, so the ball at the top of your arm becomes the socket. A metal ball is placed where the socket was previously. This is usually done for fractures or patients without a functioning rotator cuff. Your Physician will help determine which of these options is best for your condition.

Why are the precautions different for standard and reverse replacements?

Due to the structure of the implants and surgical techniques used to replace your joint, some procedures require more protection to heal. Joints that require more repair often require more healing time as well. Your surgeon will determine what precautions will best help your shoulder heal.

How long do I have to wear the sling?

This will vary, depending on your surgeon's preferences and your specific surgery. Reverse Shoulder Arthroplasty (or Reverse Total Shoulder) generally requires more time in the sling than anatomic replacements, but you should discuss this with your surgery team.

Will I get an ice machine?

Yes. You will be issued an ice machine by the inpatient nursing staff, who will also show you how to use it at home.

How long until my shoulder is functional again?

The majority of patients are able to perform most activities of daily living with relative ease about 3 months after surgery. Some recreational activities may be allowed 5-7 months after surgery, but this varies based on your specific case. Generally, contact or high impact activities like wrestling, rugby or football are not recommended, whereas low impact activities such as water aerobics, walking and biking may be allowed. Ask your surgeon what activities are safe to return to after surgery.

What is a TENS unit? Do I need one?

TENS stands for Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation. This is a small unit that helps alleviate pain by sending a current through electrodes placed on your skin. TENS therapy can be very helpful as part of a pain control regimen, but it does not affect your healing, therefore it is not crucial to recovery.

When will I follow up in clinic?

Your first follow up with your surgeon will be within 10-14 days after surgery, and then typically every few months for up to a year.

What is the recovery timeline?

Around three months after surgery, most patients have regained a fair degree of motion. Somewhere between four and six months after surgery, your shoulder is considered to be fully healed. However, you will continue to see improvements throughout the first year or so with your new shoulder.

Do I need physical therapy?

Many patients do start physical therapy after surgery, but it is not always required. Discuss this with your surgery team.

How long do these last?

Data show that the majority of patients are still doing well without complications at least 15 years after surgery, however several factors may determine the longevity of the joint.

What are my lifetime restrictions/limitations?

You should avoid activities involving impact or sudden force on the extremity, like chopping wood with an axe or driving fence posts. Any type of contact sport should also be avoided, such as football, rugby and wrestling. Weights should be limited to something you can lift 15-20 times without issue.

Will I set off metal detectors?

You may; this depends on the sensitivity of the detector. This is rarely, if ever, an issue for travel/flying.

Do I have to stay in the hospital after surgery?

Yes. You should plan to stay overnight and go home the next day. Find out how to make your transition home easier and faster by watching the Shoulder Camp video.