



**STEPHEN THON, MD**  
ORTHOPEDIC & SPORTS MEDICINE SURGEON  
[www.stephenthonmd.com](http://www.stephenthonmd.com)

# Dr. Stephen Thon

## Surgery Guide: Rotator Cuff Repair

*Your guide to Surgery and Recovery*

**Stephen G. Thon, MD**  
Phone: (303) 344-9090  
Fax: (720) 895-1121

[ThonCareTeam@occ-ortho.com](mailto:ThonCareTeam@occ-ortho.com)  
[www.AdvancedOrtho.org](http://www.AdvancedOrtho.org)  
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## MEDICATIONS

You will take multiple medications as part of our opioid sparing protocol. This protocol is designed to have fewer side effects, better, pain relief, and reduced opioid use/addiction rates. There are multiple medicines we provide but none are addictive or habit forming. You will be given a small prescription of oxycodone to take ONLY AS NEEDED. Start taking your medications the day of your surgery. It is important to have started the pain medications before your block wears off and the pain returns. You should also set an alarm for the middle of the night to take your medications.

*Sample Medication Schedule below starting first medicines at 8am*

<u>Three Times per Day</u>		
8am:	Acetaminophen 1000mg* Meloxicam 7.5mg* Methocarbamol 750mg Omeprazole 20mg Aspirin 81mg	2pm: Acetaminophen 1000mg* Methocarbamol 750mg
		~8pm: (or before bed) Acetaminophen 1000mg* Meloxicam 7.5mg* Methocarbamol 750mg

\*Can also alternate every 4 hours\*

## SLING WEAR

Your sling must be worn at all times **including while you sleep**. There are only four situations in which you may remove your sling: 1) during physical therapy, 2) to shower, 3) to change clothing, and 4) while awake and at complete rest (I.e. sitting on couch watching TV, etc...). If up and walking about the sling must be worn, this is to protect your newly repaired shoulder from re-injury. Click the link to the right for instructions on how to apply your sling.



Length of time in sling, depends on the type and extent of the repair performed:

- Isolated Collagen Implant (no anchors/sutures) – 2-4 weeks
- Full repair with anchors and sutures – 6 weeks

## DRESSINGS

Your outer dressings may be removed after 48 hours (or the morning of the second day). For example, if you had surgery on Monday then you may remove your dressings once you wake up Wednesday morning. Similarly, if you had surgery Wednesday you can remove the dressing Friday morning. Leave the steri-strips (little band-aids) over each incision until they fall off naturally. It is normal for your incisions to drain water like fluid that may be tinged red some time after your surgery. If you have some drainage, reapply some clean gauze with tape until the drainage stops. Do NOT apply any lotions, ointments, or other liquids (besides running water) to your incisions until they have completely closed and there are no scabs over the incisions. This usually takes at least 3-4 weeks.

## SHOWERING/HYGIENE

You may shower once your dressings are removed on the second day after your surgery. You may use your normal shampoo, soap, or body wash when showering. Running water is ok over the incisions, but you may not soak or submerge your incisions in water for a minimum of 3-4 weeks after your surgery. Soaking/Submerging your incisions too soon can increase your risk of getting an infection. This means no baths, pools, hot tubs, etc... until the incision is ready. The incision is ready to be submerged once the scabs from the incision have gone away.

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### **MOVEMENT/ACTIVITY/SPORTS**

You are encouraged and allowed to move your arm from the elbow down including your forearm, wrist, hand, and fingers as much as you can tolerate once your nerve block wears off. Any movement in the box from the top of your shoulders to your hip bones is safe to do as much as you'd like. It is OK to use your arm/hand for simple and light activities such as reading, writing, texting, typing, and working on the computer. Do not lift anything heavier than a "coffee cup" with your surgical arm. The motions you **absolutely want to avoid without proper supervision are:** reaching behind you, reaching out to the side away from your body, and reaching above your head. Going for light walks multiple times per day is encouraged to keep your blood flow up. Also when at rest make sure to perform ankle pumps multiple times per day to help reduce the risk of blood clots.

### **SLEEP**

Sleeping is difficult after most shoulder surgery. It is often very difficult to sleep in the first few weeks after surgery. The surgery/anesthesia itself may interfere with your sleep-wake cycle. In addition, many patients have increased shoulder pain lying flat on their back. We recommend that you try sleeping in a recliner or in a reclined position in bed. This is often much more comfortable. You may place a pillow between your body and your arm and also behind your elbow in order to move your arm away from your body slightly. This often helps with the pain. You need to wear your sling when you sleep.

### **DRIVING**

Returning back to driving is different for everyone but for most is sometime between 2-6 weeks after surgery. Some requirements to resume driving are: you **MUST** no longer be taking opioid pain medications, you must be able control the steering wheel on your own while adhering to your restrictions with your shoulder, and your reaction time and stamina must have returned to normal. Discuss driving with your therapist to see if you are ready to return to the road on your own.

### **RETURN TO WORK**

Going back to work is dependent on the type of job you perform. Most people take at least 1-2 weeks off from work after surgery. If you have a "desk" job", you may return to work whenever you feel comfortable to do so as long as you are able to wear your brace and adhere to the restrictions for your shoulder. Jobs that require heavy lifting/pushing/pulling/etc... may not be performed until much later in your recovery and may require 3+ months off of work before it is safe to return. Please discuss with your employer what (if any) light duty you may be able to perform during this time. Any paperwork required for missing time off work including FMLA should be directed to [ThonCareTeam@occ-ortho.com](mailto:ThonCareTeam@occ-ortho.com)

Work Restrictions can be found at <https://www.stephenthonmd.com/pdfs/work-restrictions-rotator-cuff-repair.pdf>

### **PHYSICAL THERAPY**

When you start physical therapy depends on the extent of your tear. The larger the tear, the more we will delay physical therapy. You should go to physical therapy (PT) at least once per week for the first 6-12 weeks. PT may increase after this time point. In addition, they should provide you with exercises to perform on your own at home. You may notice some increase in pain after your PT sessions, this is normal to experience. It should go back down with rest. PT is slow by design during the early phase and then ramps up. This is necessary to give your tendon the proper time to heal as strong as possible.

- Partial/Standard Repairs (Routine) – PT to start within 1-2 weeks after surgery
- Massive/Revision Repairs (Delayed) – PT to start 4 weeks after surgery

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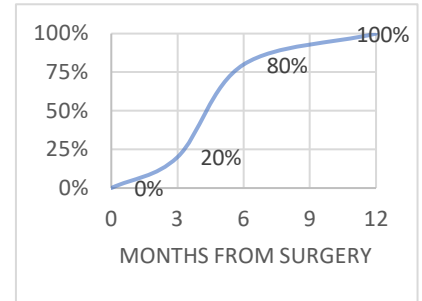
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### **EXPECTED RECOVERY**

Your recovery is slow at first, accelerates in the mid-point, and the levels out as you reach full recovery. In general, we would expect you to complete 20% of your recovery after the first three months, get up to 80% recovery between 3 – 6 months, and the final 20% of your recovery past 6 months. You should expect to have stiffness (especially with rotation) for at least 6 months after surgery. As long as it is steadily improving, this is normal.

*\*Note: This is approximate. Your recovery may be different depending on the extent of your tear\**



### **FOLLOW UP APPOINTMENTS**

You will be seen at least 6 times after your surgery to ensure your recovery is going smoothly. Most of the post-operative appointments will be seen through our physician assistants. If at any point they notice any problems during recovery they will communicate directly with Dr. Thon. Full recovery from Rotator Cuff Surgery is dependent on how severe your injury was to begin with, but is expected to be at least 6 to 12 months in total with gradually increasing times between each visit. The recovery is long, but stick with it to get the best result possible!

You will be seen at the following intervals after surgery:

- 2 weeks (Physician Assistant)
- 2 months (Physician Assistant)
- 4 months (Physician Assistant)
- 6 months (Dr. Thon)
- 8 months (Physician Assistant)
- 10 months (Physician Assistant)
- 12 months (Dr. Thon)

### **THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR AFTER SURGERY?**

Continue to look out for any fevers greater than 100.4 degrees F (38.0 degrees C) or if your incisions/shoulder becomes increasingly swollen, red, warm to the touch, or having drainage that is thick or chalky. In addition, your pain should continue to decrease with time.

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## FAQ'S

*Q: How long will the surgery take?*

A: The surgery will take about ~2-2.5 hours, but expect to be away from your loved ones longer as it takes time to go to sleep, position you for surgery, and give you time to wake up and become alert in the recover area.

*Q: What implant/prosthesis do you use and what is it made of?*

A: We use suture anchors to reattach the tendon to the bone. These are made of all sutures or a biocomposite material that will get completely replaced by bone within 24 months. Sometimes we will use another type of high density plastic anchor that will not resorb when it is needed. It is uncommon that these need to be removed in the future. Occasionally, we may augment your repair with a collagen implant to help the tissue heal in stronger. This is only necessary in specific type of tears.

*Q: Will I need to stay in the hospital overnight?*

A: No. This is an outpatient procedure.

*Q: Will I need to take any antibiotics after the surgery?*

A: Dr. Thon prescribes a specific type of antibiotic called Doxycycline for all shoulder procedures for two weeks.

*Q: What are the risks associated with surgery?*

A: As with all surgery, there are risks of anesthesia complications, infection, damage to nerves and/or vessels, fracture, failure of the repair and need for further surgery. These risks are thankfully exceedingly low.

*Q: Do I need to be in a sling?*

A: Yes. The sling will be required for minimum 6 weeks after surgery. You will be allowed to take it off to shower, get dressed, and for physical therapy, but otherwise you will need to keep this on.

*Q: What medication will I go home with after surgery?*

A: You will be prescribed an opioid sparing multimodal medication protocol. In multiple randomized controlled trials, this regimen provided improved pain control over standard opioid narcotics with improved pain scores, less constipation, and less upset stomach.

*Q: What if I am on chronic pain medication?*

A: We do not manage chronic pain medication. Please set up a plan with your prescribing provider PRIOR to your scheduled surgery date to help manage post---operative pain. We are happy to help execute this plan for both your safety and adequate pain control.

*Q: Will I be offered anything else for pain management after surgery?*

A: Yes. The anesthesiologist will offer you a nerve block to help with post---operative pain. This can provide relief for about 12---24 hours after surgery. In addition, ice will help with pain and swelling after surgery. Please make sure you have started taking your prescribed medications prior to the nerve block wearing off.

*Q: What about sleeping after surgery?*

A: Sleeping is the most challenging part of the recovery. Most patients find comfort sleeping in a Lay-Z-Boy or Barcalounger type chair. If you do not have access to these types of chairs, laying in bed with multiple pillows propping you up seems to help.

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*Q: When can I drive?*

A: Recent studies have shown that it is safe to drive for most people after 2-3 weeks after surgery. You **MUST** be off all narcotic or sedating medications prior to any driving and your range of motion must be adequate enough to grip/turn the steering wheel. This is different for everyone.

*Q: What clothing should I have for after surgery?*

A: Most people will prefer button down shirts or jackets with zippers. Women may want to get a bra that clasps in the front.

*Q: When can I go back to work?*

A: It depends on what your job is. If it involves you mainly sitting throughout the day, most patients will go back to work around 1-2 weeks post-op. If you are on your feet throughout the day, expect this to be longer. For work that requires heavy lifting, pushing, or pulling you will not be able to perform this work for a minimum of 8-12 weeks more than likely. The surgical team can provide you with a letter explaining your absence and/or restrictions if needed. Work restrictions can be found here: <https://www.stephenthonmd.com/pdfs/work-restrictions-rotator-cuff-repair.pdf>

*Q: When to call your doctor?*

A: If you experience any of the following, call your doctor:

- Severe or increasing pain
- Cold, pale, or numb fingers
- Cloudy/Thick Drainage from your surgical site (clear/red drainage is usually normal)
- A fever over 101° for over 4 hours, abnormal redness of your incision, or a bad odor from your dressing. All of these symptoms could indicate an infection.

**Disclaimer:**

Everyone's recovery is different. The above information is merely a guideline and your individual recovery may be different based on your own unique situation and circumstances. It is important to continue to see Dr. Thon at the scheduled intervals. As always, if you have any questions or concerns with any of the above information, please call our office.

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