

# Rotator Cuff Repair: Small to Medium Tear

## Physical Therapy Protocol

### Phase I – Immediate Post-Op (0 to 3 Weeks)

#### Goals:

- Protect surgical repair
- Reduce swelling and pain
- Maintain upper extremity ROM (elbow, hand, wrist)
- Gradually increase shoulder PROM
- Minimize muscle inhibition
- Educate patient on precautions and healing

#### Sling:

- Neutral rotation with abduction pillow (30–45°)
- Wear at night while sleeping

#### Precautions:

- No shoulder AROM or AAROM
- No lifting or weight-bearing with the operative arm
- Avoid scapular retraction with teres minor repair

#### Therapeutic Interventions:

- **Swelling Management:** Ice, compression
- **PROM (shoulder):** ER < 20° in scapular plane, FE < 90°
  - Seated GH table slides, horizontal table slides
- **AROM:** Elbow, wrist, and hand
  - PROM elbow flexion only if biceps tenodesis/tenotomy
- **Strengthening (Week 2):**
  - Scapular setting (avoid retraction if subscapularis or teres minor repair)

- Ball squeeze

**Criteria to Progress:**

- 90° forward elevation PROM
  - 20° ER PROM in scapular plane
  - 0° IR PROM in scapular plane
  - Palpable scapular and shoulder musculature activation
  - No complications
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**Phase II – Intermediate Post-Op (4 to 6 Weeks)**

**Goals:**

- Continue protection
- Reduce swelling and pain
- Maintain PROM
- Minimize substitution during AAROM
- Reinforce patient education

**Sling:**

- Continue use in neutral rotation with abduction pillow

**Precautions:**

- No lifting or body weight support with arm

**Therapeutic Interventions:**

- **PROM:** ER < 20°, FE < 90°
- **AAROM:** Shoulder flexion (e.g., cane flexion, sidelying elevation to 90°, washcloth press)

**Strengthening:**

- Row and shoulder extension on physioball

**Criteria to Progress:**

- Same ROM goals as Phase I
  - Minimal substitution with AAROM
  - Pain < 4/10
  - No complications
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**Phase III – Intermediate Continued (7 to 8 Weeks)**

**Goals:**

- Gradually increase ROM (PROM, AAROM, AROM)
- Initiate AROM
- Improve scapular activation

**Sling:**

- Discontinue

**Precautions:**

- Avoid lifting >10 lbs

**Therapeutic Interventions:**

- **PROM:** ER < 30°, FE < 120°
- **AAROM:** Cane elevation, incline table slides, wall ball roll
- **AROM:** Supine flexion, salutes, wall climbs, punches

**Strengthening:**

- Resistance band: rows, lawn mowers, scapular punches
- Elbow: Bicep curls (with resistance if cleared)

**Criteria to Progress:**

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- 120° FE PROM
  - 30° ER/IR PROM
  - Minimal AROM substitution
  - Pain < 4/10
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## **Phase IV – Transitional (9 to 10 Weeks)**

### **Goals:**

- Advance ROM and strength
- Enhance scapular and dynamic shoulder control

### **Precautions:**

- Avoid lifting >10 lbs

### **Therapeutic Interventions:**

- **PROM:** ER < 45°, FE < 155°, ER @ 90° ABD < 60°
- **AROM:** Scaption and FE to 90°, supine FE with elastic band

### **Strengthening:**

- Push-up plus, resistance band punches, tripod/pointer holds

### **Criteria to Progress:**

- 155° FE PROM
  - 45° ER/IR PROM
  - 60° ER @ 90° ABD
  - 120° AROM FE
  - Pain < 2/10
  - Symmetric scapular mechanics
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## **Phase V – Transitional Continued (11 to 12 Weeks)**

### **Goals:**

- Restore full ROM
- Return to functional activities

### **Therapeutic Interventions:**

- Continue all prior interventions
- Begin stretching: ER @ 90°, IR behind back, sleeper stretch, triceps/lats

### **Criteria to Progress:**

- Full, pain-free PROM and AROM
  - No compensatory AROM patterns
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## **Phase VI – Strengthening (13 to 16 Weeks)**

### **Goals:**

- Maintain ROM
- Begin RTC strengthening (MD clearance)
- Enhance functional capacity

### **Strengthening:**

- RTC: Side-lying ER, standing IR/ER, ABD
- Scapular: T/Y/W exercises, push-up plus, resistance band dynamic hug
- Biceps curls if cleared
- Motor control drills: Rhythmic stabilization, PNF (D1/D2), quadruped, ball wall taps

### **Criteria to Progress:**

- Full pain-free ROM
- ER/IR strength  $\geq 85\%$  of contralateral side

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- ER/IR ratio  $\geq 60\%$
  - Negative impingement/instability
  - MD clearance
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## **Phase VII – Return to Sport (4 to 6 Months)**

### **Goals:**

- Full strength and control
- Return to high-level function or sport

### **Strengthening and Control:**

- Resistance band ER/IR at  $90^\circ$
- Wall slides with resistance
- PNF patterns (D1/D2) with resistance
- Begin throwing or return-to-sport drills per MD

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