BaylorScott&White
ORTHOPEDIC ASSOCIATES OF DALLAS
A member of HealthTexas Provider Network

Manoj P. Reddy, MD
Sports Medicine & Shoulder Surgery
Orthopedic Associates of Dallas
469.800.7200 office | 469.800.7210 fax
DallasOrtho.com | ReddyOrtho.com

Rotator Cuff Repair

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Answers to the questions we hear most often before and after rotator cuff surgery.

THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

1 Will it hurt?

Rotator cuff repair is one of the more painful shoulder surgeries, especially in the first 1–2 weeks and at night. Pain steadily improves. Ice, a reclined sleeping position, and taking your medications on schedule help the most.

2 Why is my arm numb after surgery?

Most shoulder patients receive a **nerve block** that numbs the arm for 12–36 hours. Protect the arm in the sling while it is numb — you cannot feel heat, cold, or pressure. Start your pain medication in the evening before the block wears off so you stay ahead of the pain.

3 How long will I wear the sling, and why so long?

You will wear the sling with its pillow **at all times, including sleep, for 6 weeks**. The tendon was sewn back to the bone, and it takes about **12 weeks** to heal there. Until then, the stitches and anchors are what hold it — using the arm too early is the most common reason a repair fails.

4 When can I take the sling off?

Only for showering, dressing, and your exercises. While it is off, keep the arm relaxed at your side. You should bend and straighten your elbow, wrist, and fingers several times a day.

5 Can I use my hand?

You may use the hand for light tasks with the elbow at your side — eating, typing, writing. Do **not** lift, push, pull, or reach with the arm — not even a cup of coffee — until cleared.

6 How will I sleep?

Sleep is often the hardest part of the first few weeks. Many patients sleep best in a **recliner** or propped up on pillows in bed. Keep the sling on and place a pillow behind the elbow so the arm does not fall back behind your body. Night pain is common and improves with time — usually within the first 4–6 weeks.

7 What if my dressing gets wet?

If it is only splashed or a small area is damp, dry it with a hair dryer on the **cool** setting. If the dressing is soaked through, call our office — we may have you come in for a dressing change.

8 Is bruising down my arm normal?

Yes. Bruising and swelling often travel down the arm to the elbow and even the hand over the first 1–2 weeks. Keep moving your fingers and wrist to help it clear.

GETTING BACK TO LIFE

9 When do I start physical therapy?

Usually within 7–10 days. For the first 6 weeks, therapy is **passive** — the therapist moves your arm while your muscles stay relaxed. Active motion begins around 6 weeks, and strengthening around 12 weeks. For large repairs, therapy may start later.

10 When can I drive?

You may drive when **all** of these are true:

- You are out of the sling.
- You are off narcotic pain medication.
- You can comfortably and quickly turn the steering wheel with both hands.

We recommend a test drive in an empty parking lot with someone else in the car first.

11 When can I return to work?

Desk work: often within 1–2 weeks, one-handed. **Lifting, overhead, or manual labor:** usually 4–6 months.

12 How long until I am fully recovered?

Most patients feel much better by 3–4 months, but strength and endurance keep improving for **6–12 months**.

13 Can the tendon tear again?

Yes, especially with large tears, older age, smoking, and using the arm too soon. You can lower your risk by following your sling and lifting restrictions, not smoking, and doing your therapy.

Still have questions? Call our office at **469.800.7200**. Your post-operative instruction sheet has the specific instructions for your surgery — if anything here differs from those instructions, follow your instruction sheet.