

Shoulder Replacement Surgery

What You Need to Know

What Is Shoulder Replacement?

Shoulder replacement surgery — called total shoulder arthroplasty (TSA) or reverse total shoulder arthroplasty (rTSA) — replaces the damaged surfaces of the shoulder joint with artificial implants. It is typically performed for severe shoulder arthritis, large irreparable rotator cuff tears, or complex shoulder fractures that have not responded to conservative treatment.

A reverse total shoulder replacement (the most commonly performed today) reverses the normal ball-and-socket geometry, allowing the deltoid muscle to take over function from a damaged or absent rotator cuff. This has revolutionized outcomes for patients who previously had very limited options.

What Can I Expect After Surgery?

Weeks 1–4: Protection phase

- Arm in a sling for 4–6 weeks — protecting the healing repair
- Pendulum exercises and elbow/wrist motion begin immediately
- No lifting, pushing, or active shoulder movement
- Pain and swelling managed with ice, elevation, and medication

Weeks 4–12: Regaining motion

- Sling is gradually discontinued as directed by your surgeon
- Active-assisted and then active shoulder movements introduced
- Goal: restore comfortable functional range of motion

Months 3–6: Strengthening

- Progressive strengthening of the deltoid and remaining shoulder muscles
- Return to daily activities, light lifting, and recreational activities

Months 6–12: Full recovery

- Most patients return to full daily function and many recreational activities
- Heavy lifting and contact sports are typically permanently restricted to protect the implant

Important Precautions

- No lifting more than a coffee cup for the first 4–6 weeks
- Never use the arm to push yourself up from a chair or bed — protect the implant
- Avoid reaching behind the back (internal rotation) until cleared by your surgeon
- Inform all future healthcare providers (including dentists) about your shoulder implant
- Heavy overhead lifting and contact sports are typically permanently restricted

When Should I Be Concerned?

- Signs of infection: fever, increasing redness, warmth, or discharge
- Sudden severe increase in pain or a new pop
- Arm going numb or cold — possible vascular or nerve issue
- The shoulder feels unstable or dislocated

How Physical Therapy Maximizes Your Outcome

Physical therapy is essential after shoulder replacement. Your therapist guides you through each phase — protecting the healing tissues first, then progressively restoring motion and strength at the right pace. Patients who commit fully to their PT program consistently achieve the best outcomes: less pain, better range of motion, and faster return to the activities they love.

Most patients reach their primary functional goals within **6 to 12 months** following shoulder replacement surgery.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

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