August 2009

Retearing a Repaired Rotator Cuff

No one enters into surgery lightly. Before you underwent surgery to repair your rotator cuff, you probably weighed all the pros and cons with your doctor, so it is understandably disconcerting to discover you have retorn your rotator cuff.

A recent study by the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine found that **even after a retear, people experienced greater range of function and pain relief than those whose treatment did not include surgical intervention**. The second tears were usually smaller than the one that first led to surgery. And even if the new tear grew in size, the patients reported no pain or problems and did not need additional surgery or treatment. Many of them were not even aware of the retear until an ultrasound exam or magnetic resonance imaging revealed it. In other words, you are still better off having had the surgery, even if the cuff has torn again.

It is not entirely clear what causes a retear, although certain surgical techniques have a higher incidence of recurrent tearing. Overzealous activity can also retear the surgically repaired tendons. Fortunately, the initial repair very rarely breaks down completely, and because the original surgery enlarged the subacromial space in which the rotator cuff is confined, the shoulder is not irritated and inflamed as easily as before surgery.

However, along with poor muscle tissue quality, lifting heavy objects improperly and engaging in nonapproved athletic activities, the lack of a physical therapy regimen might be a factor. Maintaining **an active exercise program**, which includes stretching and strengthening of the shoulder muscles to avoid stiffness and weakness, is recommended. To avoid potential problems, we can prescribe exercises to

- **maintain full function of the shoulder musculature**,
- **enhance control of the shoulder blade** and
- **slowly increase flexibility**.

So if you have retorn your rotator cuff, come in and talk with us about exercises you can do to keep pain from returning.