

Subacromial decompression

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The problem:

A partial tear or irritation of the tendon of the rotator cuff.

Reason for treatment:

Pain.

The treatment:

Surgery is done arthroscopically usually through two or three holes. The soft tissue above the rotator cuff, called the bursa, is thought to contribute to pain; therefore it is removed. In addition, the bone above the rotator cuff (acromion) may impinge or press on the rotator cuff below it causing pain; therefore, this may be shaved down as well.

Day of surgery:

The patient arrives 2 hours before the procedure to meet the operative team. A catheter is placed in their vein (IV) and the patient is given a nerve block. The nerve block helps with pain after the surgery for approximately 12 hours. The patient is still put to sleep during the surgery. The surgery itself takes about one half hour, but the setup time in the operating room and the takedown time add one half hour to an hour. The surgery is done with the patient in the sitting position, so care is taken to position the patient appropriately. The patient stays in the recovery room for 1-2 hours. Most patients stay overnight for pain control, but some go home as well.

After surgery:

The patient wears a sling for one or 2 days. The patient keeps the wound dry for 7 days. Sponge baths are appropriate. Physical therapy is started the day after surgery and continues for 6 weeks to 3 months. Recovery is usually complete at 3-6 months.

The shoulder is very painful for several days and is uncomfortable for several weeks. Pain is managed with ice, anti-inflammatory medication, and narcotic pain medication. Narcotic pain medication is stopped by the sixth week after surgery.