

Solutions for Failed Rotator Cuff Surgery

When it comes to shoulder disorders, one of the biggest problems faced by patients and surgeons has been the painful, rotator cuff deficient shoulder. These patients may have rheumatoid arthritis, failed treatment of shoulder fractures or massive rotator cuff tears that are too large to repair.

In the normal shoulder, the ball and socket joint functions normally due to the presence of muscles and tendons that attach to the bones. When some of these muscles/tendons (rotator cuff) tear, the joint can become unstable and if this is not corrected in a timely fashion, the cartilage “cushions” on the bone ends wear off, resulting in arthritis.

When the torn tendon is repaired, normal function can be restored to the shoulder. However, in some situations these tendon repairs fail or there is a delay in repairing the tendon. Over time, without treatment, the muscles attached to the torn tendons deteriorate and as a consequence it may not be possible to repair a longstanding rotator cuff tear.

Some of these shoulders may be reconstructed by transferring “spare” shoulder tendons to the upper arm. This is only done when arthritis is not present. These procedures usually provide excellent outcomes in active patients 65 years of age or less. The surgery usually takes three hours and requires a short hospital stay of one or two nights. Physical therapy is required to regain function after the surgery. This procedure usually results in predictable pain relief, joint stability and improved motion. Most patients are able to return to all activities in three to six months.

For the older patient (older than 65 yrs) and those with arthritis, the best reconstructive option for the painful rotator cuff deficient shoulder, is currently a reverse total shoulder arthroplasty (RTSA). This procedure has been performed successfully in Europe for many years. There are currently three FDA approved RTSA implants available in the USA, with the first being approved just over two years ago. These designs place a ball on the socket side of the shoulder and a socket on

by Stuart Patterson, M.D.,
Board Certified Orthopaedic Surgeon



the ball; a reverse of the normal design.

These joint replacements take advantage of the normal deltoid muscle to provide motion. The surgery usually takes a couple of hours and requires a short hospital stay of one or two nights. Physical therapy is required to regain function after the surgery. This procedure usually results in predictable pain relief, joint stability and improved motion. Most patients are able to return to activities within a few months. ♥

