

Rotator Cuff Strain Rehabilitation Exercises

The rotator cuff is the group of muscles that hold your arm to your shoulder and allow your arm to rotate freely. The rotator cuff muscles can be injured in sports, chronic repetitive actions, or an acute injury.

You may do all of these exercises right away. Apply heat first with a warm shower, heating pad or hot pack for 15-30 minutes. After exercising apply cold with an ice pack. Use a plastic bag filled with frozen peas or corn for 15-30 minutes.

Phase I

- **Isometrics**

- A. **External rotation:** Standing in a doorway with your elbow bent 90° and the back of your hand pressing against the door frame, attempt to press your hand outward into the door frame. Hold for 5 seconds. Do 3 sets of 10.

- B. **Internal rotation:** Standing in a doorway with your elbow bent 90° and the front of your hand pressing against the door frame, attempt to press your palm into the door frame. Hold for 5 seconds. Do 3 sets of 10.

- **Wand exercises**

- A. **Flexion:** Stand upright and hold a stick in both hands, palms down. Stretch your arms by lifting them over your head, keeping your elbows straight. Hold for 5 seconds and return to the starting position. Repeat 10 times.

- B. **External rotation:** Lie on your back and hold a stick in both hands, palms up. Your upper arms should be resting on the floor, your elbows at your sides and bent 90°. Using your good arm, push your injured arm out away from your body while keeping the elbow of the injured arm at your side. Hold the stretch for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

- C. **Shoulder abduction and adduction:** Stand upright and hold a stick with both hands, palms down. Rest the stick against the front of your thighs. While keeping your elbows straight, use your good arm to push your injured arm out to the side and up as high as possible. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

Phase II

- **Tubing exercise for external rotation:** Stand resting the hand of your injured side against your stomach. With that hand grasp tubing that is connected to a doorknob or other object at waist level. Keeping your elbow in at your side, rotate your arm outward and away from your waist. Make sure you keep your elbow bent 90 degrees and your forearm parallel to the floor. Repeat 10 times. Build up to 3 sets of 10.

- **Tubing exercise for internal rotation:** Using tubing connected to a door knob or other object at waist level, keep your elbow in at your side and rotate your arm inward across your body. Make sure you keep your forearm parallel to the floor. Do 3 sets of 10.
- **Scaption:** Stand with your arms to your side and with your elbows straight. Slowly raise your arms to eye level. As you raise your arms, they should be spread apart so that they are and only slightly in front of your body (at about a 30 degree angle to the front of your body). Point your thumbs toward the ceiling. Hold for 2 seconds and lower your arms slowly. Do 3 sets of 10. Hold a soup can or light weight when doing the exercise and increase the weight as the exercise gets easier.
- **Sidelying external rotation:** Lie on your uninjured side with your injured arm at your side and your elbow bent to 90°. Keep your elbow against your side, raise your forearm and hold for 2 seconds. Slowly lower your arm. Do 3 sets of 10. You can start doing this exercise holding a soup can or light weight and gradually increase the weight as long as there is no pain.
- **Horizontal abduction:** Lie on a table or the edge of a bed face down with your injured arm hanging down straight to the floor. Raise your arm out to the side, parallel to the floor. Hold for 2 seconds and then lower it slowly. Start this exercise with no weight. As you get stronger add a light weight or hold a soup can. Do 3 sets of 10.
- **Push ups with a plus:** Begin on the floor on your hands and knees. Keep your arms a shoulder width apart and lift your feet off the floor. Arch your back as high as possible and round your shoulders (this is the "plus" part of the exercise). Bend your elbows and lower your body to the floor. Return to the starting position and arch your back again. Do 3 sets of 10.