

Arthroscopy of the Shoulder

What is Shoulder Arthroscopy?

Shoulder arthroscopy, or **keyhole surgery**, is a **minimally invasive procedure** used to **diagnose and treat** shoulder joint problems. The procedure involves inserting a **small telescope (arthroscope)** through tiny incisions in the skin to visualize the **inside of the joint**. Specialized surgical instruments may be used to **address underlying issues** without the need for a **larger incision**.

Your surgeon has recommended a **shoulder arthroscopy** based on your condition. However, the **decision to proceed with surgery is yours**.

This document provides **information on the benefits, risks, and procedure details** to help you make an **informed decision**. If you have any **unanswered questions**, consult your **surgeon or healthcare team**.

Once you feel **sufficiently informed** and ready to proceed, you will be asked to **sign an informed consent form**, marking the **final step** in the decision-making process. However, **you can change your mind at any time** before the procedure.



An arthroscopy of the shoulder

What are the Benefits of Surgery?

The procedure aims to accurately diagnose the problem and, in many cases, address it simultaneously. **Keyhole surgery** typically results in **less post-operative pain** and a **faster recovery** for some patients.

Are There Alternatives to Surgery?

Certain joint issues can be evaluated using **CT or MRI scans**. However, these imaging techniques **may not detect early cartilage damage, small ligament injuries, or the severity of a condition**. If non-invasive methods are insufficient, an **arthroscopy may be necessary for diagnosis and treatment**.

What Happens If I Choose Not to Have the Operation?

Without an arthroscopy, your **surgeon may not be able to determine the most effective treatment**. Some conditions may improve with **activity modification**, while others could **worsen over time** if left untreated.

What Does the Operation Involve?

Remove any **rings from your hand** before hospital admission.

The **healthcare team will confirm your identity, procedure, and surgical site**. You can assist by **verifying your details** with them.

The procedure is usually performed under **general anesthesia**, but in some cases, a **nerve block** (local anesthesia with pain relievers) may be used. Your **anesthetist will discuss the available options**.

You may receive **local anesthetic injections for post-operative pain control** and **antibiotics to lower the risk of infection**. The surgery typically takes **about 40 minutes**.

Your **surgeon will stabilize your arm using a small frame** and **inject fluid into the joint** to improve visibility. A **tourniquet** (tight strap) is often used to **minimize bleeding**.

The surgeon will make **two to four small incisions (about 0.5 cm each)** around the shoulder joint. A **telescope (arthroscope)** is inserted to examine the area, and **surgical instruments** may be used through additional incisions if treatment is required.

The **joint is assessed, loose material is removed, and rough surfaces are smoothed**. **Minor muscle or tendon tears may also be repaired**.

The incisions are closed with **stitches or adhesive plasters**.

What Should I Do About My Medication?

Inform your **healthcare team about all medications**, including **blood thinners, herbal supplements, dietary supplements, and over-the-counter drugs**, and follow their instructions.

How Can I Prepare for the Operation?

- **Stop smoking** to lower your risk of complications and improve long-term recovery.
- **Maintain a healthy weight**, as excess weight increases the risk of complications.

- **Regular exercise** can aid **preparation and recovery**. Consult your **doctor or physiotherapist** before starting any regimen.
- **Reduce infection risk** by:
 - Avoiding shaving or waxing near the surgical site **one week before surgery**.
 - **Bathing or showering** the day before or on the day of surgery.
 - **Keeping warm** before surgery and informing the healthcare team if you feel cold.
 - If **diabetic, maintaining stable blood sugar levels**.
- Discuss with the **healthcare team about necessary vaccinations** to lower the risk of illness during recovery.
- Follow **hospital hygiene protocols** such as **handwashing and wearing a face covering when requested**.

What Are the Possible Complications?

The healthcare team **takes measures to minimize risks**, but complications can still occur.

Your **doctor may assess whether you have an increased risk** due to factors such as **age, obesity, smoking, or existing conditions like diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease**. Some complications, though rare, **can be serious or even life-threatening**.

If anything is unclear, **ask your doctor for clarification**. Your **anesthetist will explain potential complications** related to anesthesia.

General Risks of Any Surgery:

- **Bleeding during or after the procedure** (blood transfusion is rarely needed).
- **Surgical site infection** (risk: **less than 1 in 100**). Keeping the **wound dry and covered** reduces this risk. Notify the healthcare team if you **develop a fever, notice pus, or experience redness, pain, or swelling**. Most infections **resolve with antibiotics**, but some **may require additional treatment or surgery**.
- **Allergic reactions** to surgical equipment, materials, or medications. Inform your doctor about any known **allergies or past reactions**.
- **Chest infection risk is lower** if you have **quit smoking** and are free from **COVID-19 symptoms** for at least **seven weeks before surgery**.

Specific Risks of This Surgery:

- **Bleeding into the joint** (risk: **less than 1 in 100**), potentially causing **swelling and pain**.
- **Infection within the shoulder joint** (risk: **less than 1 in 100**), requiring **antibiotics and possibly additional surgery**.
- **Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS)**: A **rare but severe condition causing pain, stiffness, and loss of function** in the arm and hand. Recovery may take **months to years**, and some cases result in **permanent pain or stiffness**.
- **Nerve damage** (risk: **less than 1 in 100**), which may cause **weakness, numbness, or pain**. This typically **resolves over time**, but in rare cases, it **may be permanent**.

What Are the Expected Outcomes?

- **Pain**: The healthcare team will **provide pain medication**, and it is essential to take it **as directed** to aid movement and recovery.
- **Scarring**: The incisions are **small** and typically **heal neatly**.

How Soon Will I Recover?

In Hospital

After surgery, you will be moved to the **recovery area** and then to a **ward**. Your **surgeon or physiotherapist** will guide you on how long to **keep your arm supported**.

Most patients **go home the same day**, but some may require a **longer hospital stay** based on their condition.

If you have **any concerns**, whether in the **hospital or at home**, contact the **healthcare team**. They can **provide reassurance or identify potential complications**.

Returning to Normal Activities

If you had **sedation or general anesthesia**, follow these precautions for **at least 24 hours**:

- Arrange for a **responsible adult to drive you home** and stay with you.
- **Remain near a phone** in case of an emergency.
- **Avoid driving, operating machinery, or engaging in activities requiring coordination (e.g., cooking)**.
- **Refrain from signing legal documents** or consuming **alcohol**.

Post-Surgery Care

- **Keep the wound dry for 4 to 5 days** and use a **waterproof dressing** while bathing.
- **Stitches are typically removed after 1 to 2 weeks**.

Your **physiotherapist** may provide **rehabilitation exercises** to **restore movement and strength** in the shoulder. Follow **all post-operative instructions carefully**.

The **healthcare team** will advise you when you can **resume normal activities**.

- **Avoid contact sports and heavy lifting** until **cleared** by your healthcare provider.
- **Recovery may take up to 3 months**, depending on the **procedure performed**.

Driving Restrictions

- **Do not drive** until you can **control the vehicle in an emergency**.
- **Check with your insurance provider** before resuming driving.
- If your **rotator cuff was repaired**, avoid driving for **at least two months**.

Long-Term Outlook

- **Most patients experience significant improvement**, but recovery takes time.
- **Pain and mobility improve gradually**, though some **symptoms may recur over time**.
- Additional surgery may be needed in some cases.

If the **arthroscopy was performed for diagnostic purposes**, follow-up **clinic visits** will be scheduled. If a **biopsy was taken**, results are usually available **within three weeks**.

Your **surgeon** can provide **insight** into whether further **treatment or additional surgery** is necessary.

Summary

Shoulder **arthroscopy enables accurate diagnosis and treatment** of joint issues with **minimal surgical intervention**. The procedure generally results in **less pain, smaller scars, and a faster recovery** compared to open surgery.

Surgery is typically **safe and effective**, but **complications can occur**. Understanding **potential risks and benefits** allows for an **informed decision**.

Keep this **document for reference** and consult your **healthcare team** if you have **any concerns**.

Certain risk statistics are based on **global studies**. Discuss with your **surgeon or doctor** for **personalized risk assessment and additional treatment options**.

This document provides **general medical information** and does **not replace professional advice** from your healthcare team.

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