

## Shoulder Surgery (Subacromial Decompression)

### What is the Acromion?

The **acromion** is the **topmost part of the shoulder blade** (scapula) and sits above the **rotator cuff**.

The **rotator cuff** consists of **four muscles and tendons** that help **stabilize and move the shoulder joint** by attaching the upper arm (humerus) to the acromion.

#### Common Problems with the Acromion and Rotator Cuff:

- ✓ **Rotator cuff weakness or tears** – This can lead to pain, instability, and difficulty moving the shoulder.
- ✓ **Impingement Syndrome** – This occurs when the **rotator cuff is squeezed underneath the acromion**, causing **pain, inflammation, and restricted movement**.

### What is a Subacromial Decompression?

A **subacromial decompression** is a surgical procedure in which a portion of the **underside of the acromion** is shaved off. This creates **more space for the rotator cuff to move freely**, reducing **pain and impingement symptoms**.

This procedure is often performed **alongside other surgeries**, particularly those involving the **rotator cuff**.

Your surgeon has recommended **shoulder surgery**, but the decision to proceed is entirely **yours**.

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

Once you feel comfortable with the information, you will be asked to **sign an informed consent form**. This is the **final step** in the decision-making process, but you may **change your mind at any time before the surgery**.

### What Are the Benefits of Surgery?

- ✓ **Reduced pain** – The procedure aims to relieve pressure on the **rotator cuff**, leading to **less discomfort**.
- ✓ **Improved shoulder function** – With more space in the joint, you should experience **better mobility** and **easier movement**.

### Are There Any Alternatives to Surgery?

In many cases, **shoulder impingement or rotator cuff tears** can be managed without surgery.

## Non-Surgical Treatment Options:

✓ **Activity Modification** – Avoiding movements that **worsen symptoms**, such as **overhead lifting**.

✓ **Physiotherapy** – Strengthening the **surrounding muscles** can improve stability and function.

✓ **Pain Management** – Over-the-counter pain relievers, including:

- **Paracetamol**
- **Anti-inflammatory medications** such as **ibuprofen**
  - ✓ **Steroid and Local Anaesthetic Injections** – These may provide **temporary pain relief** lasting several months, but repeated injections can have **side effects**.

⚠ **Important Note:** You should not have a steroid injection within two weeks of receiving a vaccination, as it can reduce your body's ability to produce **antibodies**.

## What Happens If I Decide Not to Have Surgery?

- Your surgeon may recommend **physiotherapy** to help **strengthen the shoulder muscles**.
- Some **cases improve over time**, but if symptoms persist for **a year or more**, the condition is **less likely to resolve on its own**.
- Without treatment, **persistent impingement** may lead to **worsening pain, weakness, and reduced range of motion**.

## What Does the Surgery Involve?

### Pre-Surgical Assessment

Before surgery, your **surgeon may request imaging tests**, including:

✓ **X-rays** – To evaluate bone structure and detect abnormalities.

✓ **Ultrasound Scan** – To assess soft tissue damage.

✓ **MRI Scan** – To examine the **rotator cuff and surrounding structures**.

These results will help your **surgeon plan the most effective surgical approach**.

## Surgical Procedure

### Pre-Operative Preparation

- The **healthcare team** will perform safety checks to ensure that you are undergoing the **correct procedure** on the **correct side**.
- You can assist by **confirming your name and the planned operation** with your surgeon and healthcare team.

### Anaesthesia and Infection Prevention

- The procedure is typically performed under **general anaesthesia**, but alternative anaesthetic techniques may be available.
- Your **anaesthetist will discuss the best option** for your medical history and condition.
- **Local anaesthetic injections** may be used to help **manage post-operative pain**.
- **Antibiotics may be administered during surgery** to reduce the risk of **infection**.

## Duration of the Surgery

- The procedure typically takes between **45 minutes to one hour**, depending on the complexity of the repair.

## Keyhole (Arthroscopic) Surgery

Whenever possible, **keyhole surgery (arthroscopy)** is used, as it is associated with:

- ✓ **Less post-operative pain**
- ✓ **Minimal scarring**
- ✓ **Faster recovery and return to daily activities**

### Procedure Steps:

1. **Small incisions (3-4 small cuts)** are made at the **front, back, and side of the shoulder**.
2. **A small telescope (arthroscope)** is inserted through one incision to provide a **clear view inside the shoulder joint**.
3. **Specialized surgical instruments** are inserted through the other incisions.
4. The surgeon will:
  - **Remove any thickened or inflamed tissue**
  - **Shave down the underside of the acromion**, creating more space for the **rotator cuff to move freely**
  - **Repair small tears in the rotator cuff** (if necessary)

### Closure and Recovery

- Once the procedure is complete, any **incisions will be closed** with **stitches or clips**.
- You will be monitored in a **recovery area** before being discharged.

## What Should I Do About My Medication?

Before your surgery, it is essential to inform your **healthcare team** about all medications you take, including:

- ✓ **Blood-thinning medications** (e.g., aspirin, warfarin, clopidogrel)
- ✓ **Herbal and complementary remedies**
- ✓ **Dietary supplements**
- ✓ **Over-the-counter medications** (e.g., ibuprofen, paracetamol)

Your **healthcare team will provide specific instructions** regarding whether any medications should be **stopped or adjusted** before surgery to **reduce the risk of complications**.

## How Can I Prepare for the Operation?

Taking **proactive steps** before surgery can **reduce the risk of complications** and improve **your recovery process**.

### Lifestyle Modifications:

- ✓ **Stop smoking** – Quitting **several weeks before surgery** reduces the risk of **complications and promotes long-term healing**.

✓ **Maintain a healthy weight** – Being **overweight increases surgical risks**; weight management may help prevent complications.

✓ **Engage in regular exercise** – Staying active can help prepare your body for surgery and support recovery.

- **Before starting any new exercises, consult your healthcare team or GP.**

### Reducing Infection Risk:

- **Do not shave or wax** the surgical area **one week before surgery** to reduce infection risk.
- **Take a bath or shower** the day before or on the day of the procedure.
- **Keep warm before and after surgery** – Inform your healthcare team if you feel cold.
- **If you have diabetes**, keep your **blood sugar levels well-controlled** to minimize infection risk.

### Hospital Preparation:

- **Speak to your healthcare team about vaccinations** to lower the risk of serious illness post-surgery.
- **Practice hand hygiene** and **wear a face covering** if requested in the hospital.

## What Complications Can Happen?

The **healthcare team will take precautions** to minimize risks, but all surgeries carry some level of risk.

Risk statistics are based on **medical studies**, and your **doctor can provide a more personalized risk assessment** based on your health condition.

Some complications can be **serious**, so it is essential to discuss any concerns with your **doctor or anesthetist** before surgery.

### General Surgical Risks:

- **Bleeding during or after surgery** – It is rare to require a **blood transfusion**.
- **Surgical site infection (risk: 1 in 100)**
  - Contact your healthcare team if you experience:
    - **Fever or high temperature**
    - **Pus or unusual discharge from the wound**
    - **Redness, swelling, or increasing pain at the wound site**
  - Most infections **resolve with antibiotics**, but occasionally the wound **needs to be drained** or **another surgery may be required**.
  - **Do not take antibiotics unless prescribed by a doctor.**
- **Allergic reactions** to surgical materials, medications, or equipment
  - The healthcare team is trained to **detect and treat allergic reactions** if they occur.
  - Inform your doctor if you have **any known allergies or past reactions** to medications, medical tests, or dressings.
- **Chest infection** – The risk is **lower if you have stopped smoking** and have been **free from COVID-19 symptoms for at least seven weeks** before surgery.

## Specific Complications of Subacromial Decompression Surgery

- **Bleeding into the Shoulder (risk: 1 in 100)**
  - This may cause **pain and swelling**.

- In some cases, additional **keyhole surgery (arthroscopy)** may be needed to **wash out the shoulder**.
- **Restricted Shoulder Movement (Frozen Shoulder) (risk: 5 in 100)**
  - This can lead to **stiffness and limited motion**.
  - Treatment options include **physiotherapy, medications, and corticosteroid injections**.
- **Deep Shoulder Infection (risk: less than 1 in 100)**
  - A severe infection may require **intravenous antibiotics** or **additional surgery** to clean out the shoulder joint.
- **Blood Clot in the Axillary Vein (Thrombosis) (risk: less than 1 in 100)**
  - A clot in the axillary vein (located under the shoulder joint) may cause **arm swelling** and require **further treatment**.
- **Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) (risk: less than 1 in 100)**
  - A rare condition that causes **severe pain, stiffness, and loss of function in the arm and hand**.
  - The **exact cause is unknown**, and **recovery can take months or years**.
  - Treatment may involve **pain management strategies and physiotherapy**.
- **Nerve Damage (risk: less than 1 in 100)**
  - This may cause **weakness, numbness, or pain** in the shoulder or arm.
  - In most cases, **nerve function improves over time**, but in rare cases, the effects may be **permanent**.

## Consequences of This Procedure

### Pain Management

- The **healthcare team will provide pain relief medication** to help manage discomfort after surgery.
- It is essential to **take the medication as prescribed** to allow for movement and promote healing.

### Scarring

- **If you have keyhole (arthroscopic) surgery**, scarring is minimal.
- **If you have open surgery**, the incision will be **larger** (usually at the front of the shoulder), increasing the risk of noticeable scarring. However, most scars **heal neatly over time**.

## How Soon Will I Recover?

### In the Hospital

- After the operation, you will be **transferred to the recovery area** before being moved to a **hospital ward**.
- **Post-Surgical Immobilization:**
  - You will need to **keep your arm in a sling** for support.
  - In most cases, the **sling is only needed for a few days** to improve comfort.
  - If **your rotator cuff was repaired at the same time**, you may need to **wear the sling for several weeks**.
- **Discharge:**
  - Most patients can **go home the same day**, but some may require **a longer hospital stay** depending on their recovery progress.
- If you have **any concerns** during your hospital stay or at home, contact the **healthcare team** for reassurance or medical advice.

## Returning to Normal Activities

If you received **sedation or general anaesthesia** and are discharged on the same day:

- ✓ A **responsible adult must take you home** in a car or taxi and **stay with you for at least 24 hours**.
- ✓ **Stay near a phone** in case of emergency.
- ✓ **Avoid driving, operating machinery, or engaging in hazardous activities** (including cooking) for **at least 24 hours**, or until you have fully regained **coordination and movement**.
- ✓ **Do not sign legal documents or consume alcohol** for at least **24 hours**.

### Post-Surgical Wound Care

- Keep your **wounds dry for 7 days** and use **waterproof dressings** when showering or bathing.
- If your **wounds remain clean and dry after 7 days**, you can **remove the dressings**.
- **Stitches or clips** are usually removed **about one week after surgery**.

### Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation

- A **physiotherapist will provide exercises and movement guidance** to support your recovery.
- **Follow all instructions carefully** to maximize recovery and regain strength and movement.

### Resuming Activities

- Your healthcare team will **guide you on when it is safe to return to normal activities**.
- **Avoid contact sports or heavy lifting** until your healthcare team confirms it is safe.
- **Recovery Timeline:**
  - Full recovery and return to normal activities **may take up to 6 months**.
- **Driving Restrictions:**
  - **Do not drive or ride a bike** until you can safely **control your vehicle, including in an emergency**.
  - **If your surgeon repaired a rotator cuff tear, do not drive for at least two months**.

## The Future

✓ **8 out of 10 people experience significant improvement**, but **pain relief and improved mobility take time**.

✓ **The shoulder is a complex joint**, and in some cases, **symptoms may return over time**.

## Summary

Subacromial decompression surgery can **help reduce pain and weakness caused by impingement**. The procedure is **generally safe and effective**, but **complications can occur**.

✓ Understanding **the benefits and risks** will help you make an **informed decision** about your treatment.

✓ Being aware of potential complications **allows for early detection and treatment** if needed.

## Important Information

- Keep this document as a **reference** for discussing your treatment with the **healthcare team**.
- Some **risk statistics** in this document are based on **global studies and medical databases**.
- Your **doctor or surgeon can provide a more personalized risk assessment** and discuss **alternative treatment options** if necessary.

## Disclaimer

This document is **for informational purposes only** and **should not replace professional medical advice** from your **doctor or healthcare team**. Always consult a qualified medical professional for guidance tailored to your specific condition.

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