POST-OPERATIVE PROTOCOL

Reverse Total Shoulder Replacement

Also called reverse shoulder arthroplasty

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This sheet takes you through your recovery, phase by phase, after a reverse total shoulder replacement. The main aim of the operation is a comfortable shoulder. The first six weeks are about protecting the new joint while it settles, and keeping everything else moving.

SLING	EXERCISES	WEIGHT ON THE ARM	SWIMMING
4 to 6 weeks	3 times a day	From 12 weeks	From 4 months

Your operation

Normally the ball of the shoulder is at the top of the arm bone and the socket is on the shoulder blade, with a group of tendons called the rotator cuff holding the ball in place as the arm moves. When the cuff or the joint is badly damaged, a reverse replacement swaps them over: a metal ball goes on the shoulder blade, and a socket on the arm bone. This lets the deltoid, the large muscle over the shoulder, lift the arm without the cuff.

To reach the joint, a tendon at the front of the shoulder is usually detached and then repaired, and it takes about six weeks to heal. In the early weeks the new joint can also be pushed out of place in certain positions, mainly with the arm behind your back or across your body. That is why the first six weeks come with limits.

Your sling

- Wear the sling for about 4 weeks, day and night, including in bed. After a fracture or a repeat operation you may need it for up to 6 weeks. Dr Malik will tell you when you can stop.
- Take it off to wash, and to do your exercises. To wash under your arm, lean forwards and let the arm hang down gently.

For the first 6 weeks, avoid

- Letting the arm drop back behind the line of your body, for example when lying down or leaning back in a chair: support the elbow on a pillow.
- Reaching behind your back, for example to tuck in a shirt or wash your back. Use your other hand when you go to the toilet.
- Reaching across your body with the arm turned in, for example to wash the opposite armpit.
- Reaching up behind your head, for example to brush the back of your hair.
- Turning the arm outwards too far: with your elbow bent at your side, your hand should not go further out than pointing straight ahead.

- Using force to turn the arm inwards, for example pulling a heavy door towards you.
- Taking your weight on the arm, for example pushing up from a chair or bed, or pulling on the banister on the stairs. Avoid this one for 12 weeks.

Easing pain and swelling

- Take your painkillers regularly, as prescribed, rather than waiting for the pain to build up. The exercises are much easier when the pain is under control.
- Once the numbness from the anaesthetic has worn off, an ice pack wrapped in a thin towel, for up to 20 minutes at a time, several times a day, eases pain and swelling. Keep the dressing dry.
- Many people sleep better propped up on pillows, with a pillow supporting the operated arm.

Getting back to everyday life

- Driving: ask your doctor before you drive again. When you can depends on your progress, and on feeling confident that you can control the car safely.
- Walking stick or frame: do not lean on it with the operated arm for 12 weeks.
- Heavy lifting: if your work involves heavy lifting, avoid it for 6 months.
- Swimming: from about 4 months, starting with gentle breaststroke.

CONTACT THE CLINIC URGENTLY IF

- You have a fever, or feel unwell.
- The wound becomes red, hot or more swollen, or starts to leak.
- The pain suddenly gets much worse, or your painkillers are not controlling it.
- Your hand goes numb, or your fingers turn cold, pale or blue.
- You have pain or swelling in your calf.
- You have a fall, the shoulder suddenly feels different, or you suddenly cannot lift the arm.

Clinic: +91 99197 03477. If you are short of breath or have chest pain, go to the nearest emergency department straight away.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- Start Phase 1 on the day after your operation, unless you are told otherwise.
- Move slowly and smoothly. Some discomfort is normal, but stop if a movement causes sharp pain, and never force it.
- Keep within the limits for your phase. Check in a mirror that your shoulder does not hitch up towards your ear as you move.
- The timings are for a planned operation, and are a guide. After a fracture or a repeat operation some are longer, and Dr Malik may adjust them for you.
- This sheet does not replace individual advice. If it differs from what you were told in clinic, follow the advice you were given there.

WEEKS 0–6

Phase 1: Protecting the new joint

The new joint and the repair at the front of the shoulder are at their most vulnerable. Move the shoulder only with help, keeping the arm in front of you, below shoulder height, and not turned outwards past pointing straight ahead. Keep the rest of your body active too, for example with short walks.

01 Neck, elbow, wrist and hand

Keeping the joints around the shoulder moving while the arm is in the sling.

1. Neck: sitting up tall, turn your head slowly to look over each shoulder in turn, then tilt each ear towards its shoulder.
2. Elbow: with the sling off and your upper arm resting at your side, bend and straighten the elbow as far as it goes.
3. Wrist and hand: circle your wrist both ways, then make a fist and spread your fingers wide.

REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
10 of each	3 times a day

02 Shoulder blade exercises

Keeping the shoulder blade moving freely, and helping your posture.

1. Sit or stand up tall, with the operated arm resting in the sling or on a pillow.
2. Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears, then let them drop and relax.
3. Draw your shoulders gently forwards, then squeeze your shoulder blades back and down. Hold for 5 seconds, and relax.

REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
10 of each	3 times a day

03 Table slides

Moving the shoulder, with the table taking the weight of the arm.

1. Sit at a table with your operated arm resting on it, the hand on a small towel.
2. Lean your body forwards so that your hand slides forwards along the table. The arm moves because you lean, not because you lift it.
3. Slide forwards, and a little out to the side, only as far as is comfortable, keeping the arm in front of you and below shoulder height.
4. Sit back to slide the hand back. As it gets easier, slide the hand in small circles too.

REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
10	3 times a day

04 Waking up the shoulder muscle

Gently switching on the deltoid, the large muscle over the shoulder that will now lift your arm, without moving the joint.

1. Stand side-on to a wall, the operated arm nearest to it, with the elbow bent to a right angle and tucked into your side. The arm does not move in this exercise.
2. Sideways: press the outside of your elbow gently against the wall.
3. Forwards: turn to face the wall, and press your fist gently against it.
4. Use only about a third of your full strength, and never push into pain.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	10 each way	3 times a day

> **MOVING ON** At a clinic visit roughly six weeks after your operation, Dr Malik will check the new joint, usually with an X-ray. Move on when he is happy with it and with how you are moving the arm.

WEEKS 6–12 Phase 2: Using the arm again

If you are still wearing the sling, stop gradually, starting at home. Use the arm for light tasks at waist or chest height, such as holding a mug of water, buttering bread, brushing your teeth, washing your face or writing for short spells, and pace yourself. Add these exercises, progressing steadily and respecting pain.

By 8 to 12 weeks, aim to move the arm as freely and as far as your shoulder allows: how far varies from person to person. Turning the arm outwards comes back more slowly, starting at about 30°.

05 Lying arm raises

Raising the arm lying down, where it takes less effort and the shoulder is well supported.

1. Lie on your back with a pillow under your head.
2. Hold the wrist of your operated arm with your other hand, and bend the operated elbow.
3. With your other hand helping, raise the arm until your upper arm points at the ceiling, then lower it slowly.
4. As it gets easier, keep the elbow straight, and let your other hand do less of the work.

REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN	NEXT STEP
10	3 times a day	Elbow straight, less help

06 Turning the arm outwards

Gently regaining the outward turn of the arm, a little at a time.

1. Lie on your back with your operated elbow bent to a right angle, tucked into your side and resting on a folded towel.
2. Hold a stick, such as a rolled umbrella, in both hands.
3. Use your other arm to push the operated hand slowly outwards, keeping the elbow tucked in.
4. At first, go no further than about 30°: a third of the way from pointing at the ceiling to pointing out to the side. Over the following weeks, go gradually further as comfort allows.

REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN	START AT
10	3 times a day	About 30°, then further

07 Raising the arm

Lifting the arm on its own, starting with the easier versions.

1. Stand facing a wall and walk your fingers up it as high as is comfortable, then walk them back down.
2. Then raise the arm forwards without the wall: at first lean forwards a little, which makes it easier, and later stand upright.
3. Raise it out to the side in the same way, with your thumb pointing up.
4. Use a mirror: your shoulder should not hitch up towards your ear. If it does, go back to the easier version for a while.

REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
10 of each	3 times a day

08 Reaching behind your back

Regaining the movement you need to reach behind you, for example to tuck in a shirt.

1. Stand holding a towel behind your back, the operated hand at the lower end.
2. Use your other hand to draw the towel upwards, gently sliding the operated hand up your back.
3. Hold the stretch for 10 seconds, then relax. Never force it.

REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN	HOLD
10	3 times a day	10 seconds

09 Working against your own hand

Training the shoulder muscle to start the lift, with your other hand as resistance.

1. Make a fist with the hand on the operated side.
2. Place the flat palm of your other hand against the fist, and press just firmly enough that raising the arm takes some effort.
3. Push against that resistance as you raise the arm forwards, then lower it slowly. It should feel like work, but not painful.

REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
10	3 times a day

> MOVING ON Strengthening with weights, and taking weight through the arm, start from about 12 weeks, when Dr Malik is happy with your progress.

FROM 12 WEEKS Phase 3: Getting stronger

You can start using the arm above chest height as comfort allows, as long as the shoulder does not hitch, and begin taking weight through it gradually. Your physiotherapist will build up your strength, for example arm raises with a light weight, and upper-arm exercises. Increase your use of the arm gradually, and ease off if it becomes tired or sore.

What to expect

Recovery is gradual, and the shoulder keeps improving for many months, so it is worth keeping up your exercises. The main aims are a comfortable shoulder, and being able to lift the arm for everyday tasks. Reaching behind your back and turning the arm outwards often remain more limited than lifting it.

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