

Winston Salem Shoulder

Dr. S. Bradley Winter, MD • OrthoCarolina

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Rotator Cuff Tear — Conservative Rehabilitation Protocol

Non-Operative Management of Partial or Full-Thickness Tears • Dr. S. Bradley Winter, MD

PHASE 1: ACUTE MANAGEMENT | Weeks 0–4

GOALS

- Reduce pain and inflammation
- Restore pain-free ROM
- Patient education

EXERCISES / ACTIVITIES

- Cryotherapy 3–4x daily
- Gentle pendulums
- PROM/AAROM in pain-free range
- Activity modification
- NSAIDs as directed

PRECAUTIONS

- Avoid overhead reaching in pain
- No resistance training
- Avoid provocative positions

PHASE 2: MOTION RESTORATION | Weeks 4–8

GOALS

- Full pain-free AROM
- Improve neuromuscular control
- Scapular position

EXERCISES / ACTIVITIES

- AROM in all planes
- Scapular retraction and depression
- Closed-chain shoulder stability
- Periscapular strengthening

PRECAUTIONS

- No resisted IR/ER if painful
- Discontinue if pain worsens

PHASE 3: STRENGTHENING | Weeks 8–16

GOALS

- Progressive cuff and periscapular strength
- Reduce subacromial impingement
- Improve function

EXERCISES / ACTIVITIES

- Theraband IR/ER
- Side-lying ER
- Prone extension and row
- Serratus anterior activation
- Dynamic stability drills

PRECAUTIONS

- Avoid impingement arc (60–120° elevation) if painful

PHASE 4: RETURN TO ACTIVITY | Weeks 16–24

GOALS

- Functional independence
- Prevent re-injury
- HEP for maintenance

EXERCISES / ACTIVITIES

- Sport-specific or work-specific strengthening
- Overhead training (if indicated)
- Independent home program

PRECAUTIONS

- Surgical consultation if no improvement by 3–6 months

This protocol is a general guideline and may be modified by Dr. Winter based on intraoperative findings, tissue quality, and individual patient factors. Do not progress through phases without clearance from your surgeon or physical therapist. Questions? Contact OrthoCarolina at (336) 765-5400.

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