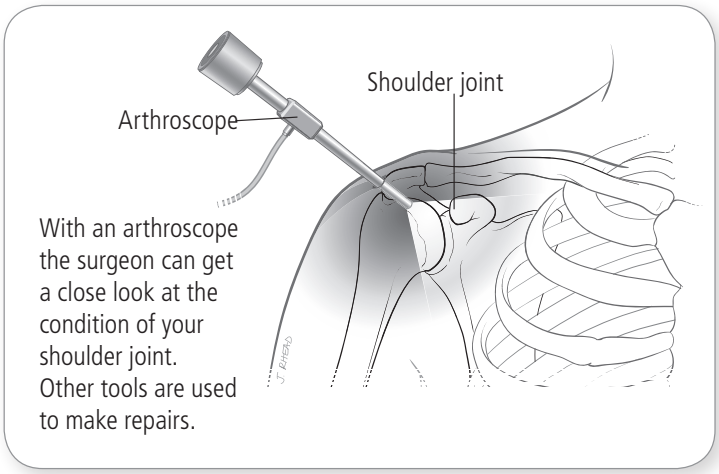
Intermountain® Healthcare

Shoulder Arthroscopy: *Preparing for Surgery*

What is shoulder arthroscopy?

Shoulder arthroscopy is a surgery to examine or repair tissues in and around your shoulder joint. Your surgeon will make a small incision (cut) in your shoulder and insert a pencil-thin camera, called an **arthroscope.** This allows the surgeon to take a closer look at the condition of your shoulder. If the joint needs to be repaired, the doctor will insert surgical instruments through other small incisions.

Shoulder arthroscopy uses smaller incisions than open surgery, so it usually involves a faster recovery and fewer complications. Not all shoulder problems can be repaired with arthroscopy, though. Your surgeon will recommend the best method for repairing your shoulder.



Why do I need it?

Shoulder arthroscopy can be used to diagnose and treat a number of problems. Your doctor will perform tests, such as an x-ray or MRI, to understand your shoulder. Problems commonly treated with shoulder arthroscopy include:

- **Rotator cuff problems.** A tendon may be torn or may have pulled away from the arm bone.
- **Shoulder instability.** The shoulder joint may be loose and the arm bone may slip out of the shoulder socket (or, become dislocated).
- **Shoulder impingement.** Bone growths (spurs) or inflamed tissues may be interfering with shoulder movement.

Talking with your doctor

To decide whether to have shoulder arthroscopy, talk to your doctor. Discuss the surgery's potential benefits, its risks, and your treatment alternatives. The table below lists the most common of these, but other benefits and risks may apply in your situation.

How do I prepare for surgery?

- **Prepare you household** so you can take care of your activities of daily living with the hand on the non-surgery side.
- **Don't eat or drink anything** after midnight the night before surgery.
- **Bring a large shirt** that buttons up the front to wear home. You won't want to have to pull a shirt over your head.

Potential benefits	Risks and potential complications	Alternatives
In comparison to open surgery, arthroscopy results in: • Less pain and stiffness • Fewer complications • Shorter hospital stays • Faster recovery	Complications are not common. Still, there are risks involved in any surgery. These can include allergic reactions to medications, breathing problems, bleeding, infection, and blood clot. Risks of shoulder arthroscopy include: • Shoulder stiffness • Continued pain • Weakness in the shoulder • Failure of the repair to heal • Injury to a blood vessel or nerve	Your doctor may also recommend: • Non-surgical methods, including physical therapy or change in activity level • Open surgery that completely exposes the shoulder joint

What happens before surgery?

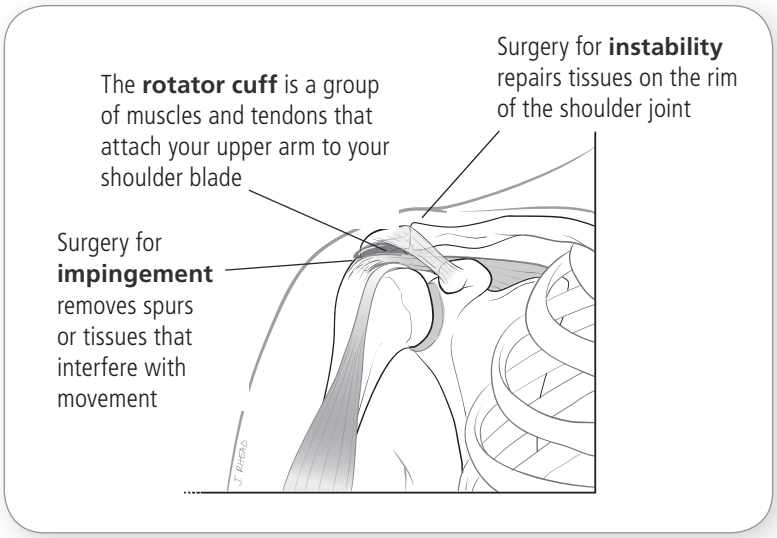
When you arrive at the hospital the morning of your surgery, this is what you can expect:

- **Preparation.** You will change into a hospital gown. A healthcare provider will mark the shoulder to be operated on.
- **Anesthesia.** You will be given anesthesia so you don't feel the surgery. You may be given one or more of the following:
  - Regional anesthesia, so you don't feel anything near your shoulder.
  - General anesthesia that puts you to sleep and prevents feeling in your whole body.
- **Your family and friends** will wait for you in a waiting area. They will be able to meet you again after you recover from anesthesia.

What happens during surgery?

The surgery usually lasts about 1 hour. The following things will happen:

- **Evaluation.** The surgeon will make a small (about 1/2-inch) incision in your shoulder and insert the arthroscope. The arthroscope will project enlarged images of your shoulder joint onto a screen. The area may also be inflated with harmless fluid so the parts of your shoulder will be easier to see and work on.
- **Procedures.** To make repairs on your shoulder, the surgeon will make 2 or 3 more small incisions. Repairs may include:
  - **Rotator cuff repair,** in which tears in the tendons are repaired and extra bone growth is shaved down.
  - **Surgery for shoulder instability,** in which the rim of the shoulder joint and the tissues that attach to it are repaired.
  - **Surgery for shoulder impingement,** in which damaged or inflamed tissue is cleaned out. Areas of bone growth may be shaved down.



- **Closing the incision.** Your incisions will be closed with sutures (stitches) or staples and covered with a dressing (bandage). Your surgeon will remove the sutures or staples when your incisions have healed.

What happens after?

Most people go home the day of surgery. You will be able to go home as soon as your surgeon feels it is safe for you. Here's what to expect:

- **Monitoring your recovery**. After your surgery you will be taken to a recovery area and monitored until your anesthesia wears off. Your family and friends may visit after you are awake.
- **Pain management.** You will be given medication to control your pain. This may include a small device you wear home, called an LAID. You may also be given a cold pack. **If the these treatments are not controlling your pain well, be sure to tell your healthcare providers.**
- **Sling.** You may be instructed to keep your arm in a sling for a week or longer. Your healthcare providers will show you how to use it.
- **Recovery**. Recovery from shoulder surgery can take 1 to 6 months. For information on your recovery and on what to do at home, ask for the Intermountain fact sheet *"Shoulder Arthroscopy: Recovering at Home."*

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