

# Care after surgery on your shoulder

Musculoskeletal and specialist surgery

Produced: February 2026

Review: February 2029

Information for Patients

Leaflet number: 1709 Version: 1

## Introduction

There are different types of shoulder surgery that can be performed depending on your injury or condition. This leaflet will help you get the best result from your specific surgery. The surgeon will talk with you before surgery about the best options for you. They will also let you know if you will need to stay in overnight.

## Key hole surgery (arthroscopy)

Arthroscopy is a type of key hole surgery where the surgeon makes 2 or 3 small puncture holes in the front and back of the shoulder. This lets the surgeon remove pieces of bone or any loose bodies causing reduced movement. They can also repair torn tendons and muscles with stitches or anchors. The holes will be sealed after surgery with a small stitch. Most patients having key hole surgery will be able to go home the same day if there are no complications.

## Open shoulder surgery

If the surgeon needs better access to your shoulder for procedures such as shoulder replacement surgery they will make a larger cut in the front of your shoulder. The wound will be sealed after surgery with stitches or steristrips and covered with a dressing.

## Anaesthetic

You may be given a general anaesthetic. This is where you will be put to sleep. We may also give you a nerve block to your arm / shoulder. Your arm will feel numb and heavy and you may not be able to move it as normal for up to 24 hours (1 day) after your surgery. Tingling may stay for 48 hours (2 days). If just a nerve block is used, you will be awake throughout your surgery but feel no pain.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.uhleicester.nhs.uk](http://www.uhleicester.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net)

## Managing pain

The doctor will talk about what pain relief you need before you go home. Take your painkillers as prescribed and if needed. If pain lasts for more than 3 to 4 days or if it suddenly gets worse after this time you must get advice from your GP or call the contact numbers given to you by the hospital.

## Exercise plan

It is important that you see the physiotherapist before you go home. They will give you an exercise plan to help you recover. It is very important that you follow the instructions for your type of surgery. The ward physiotherapist may also make a follow up appointment a few weeks after surgery for you to be seen in physiotherapy outpatients.

**Active exercise** is where you move the affected arm yourself. **Passive exercise** is where you use your other arm to help move the arm you have had the operation on.

## Possible risks of surgery

The surgeon will talk about the advantages and disadvantages of surgery. The outcome of the surgery can be different for each patient.

- Infection. Every surgery has a risk of wound infection. We do all we can to reduce this. The risk is low.
- Nerve damage causing numbness.
- Blood vessel damage.
- Sensitive or painful scar.
- No obvious improvement.
- Small risk of bones being broken in the upper arm during the surgery.
- Frozen shoulder. This delays recovery but can usually be overcome.
- Repaired tendons may tear again if the tendon is fragile or if force is put through the arm too soon.

## After your surgery

- Sometimes we may insert a drain in your shoulder to remove any excess bleeding. The nurses will often remove this after a couple of hours depending on the amount draining and the surgeons instruction.
- Your shoulder will often be in a sling. The type of sling and wearing instructions will be for your type of surgery and your specific exercise plan. Your physiotherapist who will teach you how to carefully position the sling for personal hygiene and getting dressed.
- You will be encouraged to move your hand, fingers and elbow as guided by the physiotherapist.



- **You may have a bulky pressure dressing over the top of the wound cover. You can remove this yourself after 24 to 48 hours (1 to 2 days) if there is no sign of excess bleeding. The pressure dressing is made of a cream foamy fabric stretched over a pad.**
- If the wound covering underneath is still clean and dry you may not need to change it at all. If it gets wet or if your wound leaks a lot you may change it after 2 days. Always wash your hands before and try not to directly touch the wound. Carefully peel the old dressing off and apply a new one. Keep the wound covered, clean and dry until you see the nurse in the outpatient wound clinic. This will be 10 to 14 days after your surgery. The ward will give you spare dressings. You do not need to change it every day. Just one change may be all that is needed.
- Recovering from some shoulder surgery may take months before you get the full benefit. You may have to stop driving and be unable to lift heavy objects during that time.
- Time off work depends very much on the type of work you do. Every case is individual and needs to be guided by your consultant and physiotherapist. A follow up appointment will be arranged with your consultant for a few weeks after surgery. You will get this by post.

## Contact details

Department of: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact details: \_\_\_\_\_

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل  
જો તમને અસ્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net)