

Pectoralis Major Repair

What is the pectoralis major and how is it injured?

The pectoralis major (or “pec”) is comprised of two muscle units that originate from your chest and attach to your arm. It is a very strong muscle used for pushing objects away from your body. While infrequently injured, the tendon of this muscle can tear from heavy weightlifting (e.g. bench press) or when pushing heavy objects.

How do you repair the tendon?

This tendon is repaired by making an approximately 8cm incision over your shoulder. The tendon is found and then heavy sutures and anchors are placed into your humerus to fix the tendon back down to bone, so it may heal in its appropriate position. Very rarely the tendon cannot be repaired and sometimes a cadaver tendon is needed to help reattach your pec muscle to the humerus bone. This is more commonly seen if your pec tendon tore 2-3 months prior to your surgery. If there is a concern for this, we will commonly discuss this before surgery so there are no surprises.

When can I return to sports or weightlifting?

It takes approximately 3 months for the tendon to heal to bone. At three months we will start strengthening the arm. By 4.5 months after surgery your tendon is strong enough to return to normal sporting activities or weightlifting. At this point you may start doing bench presses, lat pulldowns, dips, pushups, and pull-ups in the gym. I would recommend you wait until 6 months after surgery before you are doing heavy 1 rep maxes in the gym to give your pec muscle and the other muscles plenty of time to recover and strengthen before they see a very heavy load.

Surgery Information

Length of Stay

This is a same-day procedure – meaning once the surgery is done and you have recovered in our recovery unit (PACU) then you will go home. You will need someone available to stay in the facility during the day of your surgery and drive you home afterwards.

Anesthesia

You will typically receive two types of anesthesia for this surgery.

- General anesthesia: meaning you are asleep during the procedure
- Nerve Block: the anesthesiologist will place medicine around the nerves that go to your arm. This will cause the arm to feel numb and not move. This block is very helpful for pain control after surgery and will last for about 12-24 hours.

Incisions and Dressings

Your shoulder will be covered with two layers of dressings. The top layer will be gauze and adhesive dressing. This adhesive is waterproof, so feel free to shower starting the day after

surgery. You may leave this dressing in place until you see me in clinic OR if it falls off, peels up, or starts letting water in underneath, then you may remove this adhesive dressing. You do not need to replace with another dressing unless you would like to.

The second layer of dressing is a white, silk strip that is waterproof. You may shower over this dressing if your top layer has come off. Please leave this dressing in place until you see me in clinic. You may see some dark spots on this dressing from dried blood. That is completely normal.

When showering, do not scrub the incision or dressings, just allow soap and water to run over the dressing/incision. Please do not submerge your incision under water for 4 weeks after surgery – no swimming pools, hot tubs, or baths. Do not apply any oils, ointments, or lotions to your incision or around your incisions.

Sling

When you wake up from surgery, a sling will be on your arm. This sling is very important to protect the repair on your shoulder. You will be in a sling full time for 6. You may remove the sling for the following circumstances:

- Showering or changing clothes
- If you are relaxing on the couch – arm supported with pillows underneath the elbow
- When you are performing your home exercises or exercises with physical therapy

Is my sling in the correct position?

This is a very common question. For a pectoralis major tendon repair, the best position for your arm to be in is with your forearm resting across your stomach rather than your forearm resting to your side as you most commonly see people wearing a sling.

Pain Control

The first week or two is typically the worst. The swelling in your shoulder and hand is completely normal and will go away within the first week. Here are some helpful tips for pain control:

- Review my “Post-operative medication” information sheet I provided or on my website. I prescribe many different medications after surgery to help control your pain in different ways.
- Sleep: wear your sling and place a pillow behind your elbow while you sleep. Please sleep on your back. Many patients find sleeping in a reclined position is the most comfortable position – a recliner or propping your back up with pillows may be very helpful.
- Ice: I strongly recommend ice after surgery. This will help with the pain and swelling after surgery. Apply for 20 minutes on and then 20 minutes off, repeat as needed. Ice-packs work just as well as an ice machine – and are significantly cheaper; however, many patients find the ice machine to be less hassle. Amazon and some medical supply stores supply these ice machines.

Post-operative Appointment

I will see you at roughly the following intervals after surgery: 2 weeks, 6 weeks, 3 months, and 5-6 months – or until you return to your sport

After your surgery, if you do not have a first post-operative visit appointment please call our office so we can schedule to see 2 weeks after surgery.

For any concerns, please contact my office

Please call my office if you begin to experience any of the following after surgery:

- Fever above 101.5 F
- Loss of motion or new onset numbness after surgery (your nerve block will be in place for approximately 24 hours after surgery)
- Excessive bleeding that is saturating the bandages
- Increased pain, increased redness around the incision, purulent drainage (thick, white drainage with a foul odor), or persistent drainage > 4 days.

Post-operative Rehab and Restrictions

Physical Therapy or Home Therapy

Your main goal after surgery is allowing the soft tissues to recover from the procedure by staying in the sling. During the first two weeks after surgery, please do the exercises listed in the document “Phase I – home exercise program”. This consists mainly of shoulder pendulum swings, ball squeezes, hand/wrist/elbow motion. You may come out of your sling when you are doing these exercises.

At your 6-week surgery visit, I will give you a physical therapy prescription or a home exercise routine if you would prefer to do your exercises at home without a therapist.

Restrictions after surgery

- Sling:
 - Full-time 6 weeks after surgery
- Motion restrictions:
 - Do not push yourself out of a chair or bed with your operative arm until 12 weeks after surgery
- Strengthening and weightlifting:
 - **No strengthening operative arm until 12 weeks after surgery**
 - Weightlifting restrictions: avoid bench press, Olympic lifts, and overhead press until 4.5 months post-op

Helpful resources during your recovery



Post-op Button or Magnetic shirts

You can find these shirts on amazon by searching “Post-op shoulder surgery shirts”. They have magnetic or button options that make it very easy to change your shirt without taking your sling off. They are typically ~\$15 per shirt.



Ice Machine

While ice packs are cheap and just as effective, many patients like to use ice machines after shoulder surgery as they are less hassle. These machines can be found in medical supply stores but Amazon will sell these for much cheaper (~\$100). Search “ice machine for shoulder surgery” to find multiple options.



Door Pulley

A door pulley is a very helpful way to work on range of motion exercises for your shoulder. Using the non-operative arm you can raise your operative arm without any effort (passive) or with some effort from your operative arm (active-assist). You can find these on Amazon by searching "Door Pulley for Shoulder Therapy".



Resistance Bands

Resistance bands are used in many of my home exercise routines for patients after around 3 months from surgery. You can find these on Amazon by searching "Theraband resistance bands". Keep the band resistance under ~5 pounds.