Arthroscopy of the Shoulder

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What is an arthroscopy of your shoulder?

An arthroscopy (keyhole surgery) is performed to diagnose and treat problems in your shoulder joint. It involves examining the inside of the joint using a telescope inserted through small cuts on your skin.

What are the benefits of surgery?

The aim is to confirm exactly what the problem is and for many people the problem can be treated at the same time.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Problems inside a joint can often be diagnosed using tests such as CT scans and MRI scans. However, they do not show early damage to the surface of joints, damage to small ligaments or how bad any damage is, and you may then need an arthroscopy to treat the problem.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is usually performed under a general anaesthetic but sometimes a nerve block is used, where local anaesthetics and other painkillers are injected near the major nerves to your arm.

The operation usually takes about 40 minutes.

Your surgeon will usually make about two to four small cuts, about half a centimetre long, around the joint. They will insert a small telescope through one of the cuts so they can examine the joint. They will insert surgical instruments through the other cuts if they need to treat any problems with the joint.

How can I prepare myself for the operation?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Speak to the healthcare team about any vaccinations you might need to reduce your risk of serious illness while you recover. When you come into hospital, practise hand washing and wear a face covering when asked.

What complications can happen?

Some complications can be serious and can even cause death.

General complications of any operation

- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- Chest infection

Specific complications of this operation

- Bleeding into the joint
- Infection in your shoulder joint
- Severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of your arm and hand
- Damage to nerves around the joint

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain
- Unsightly scarring of your skin,

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home the same day.

The physiotherapist may give you exercises and advice to help you to recover from the operation.

It can take up to 3 months to get back to normal activities.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

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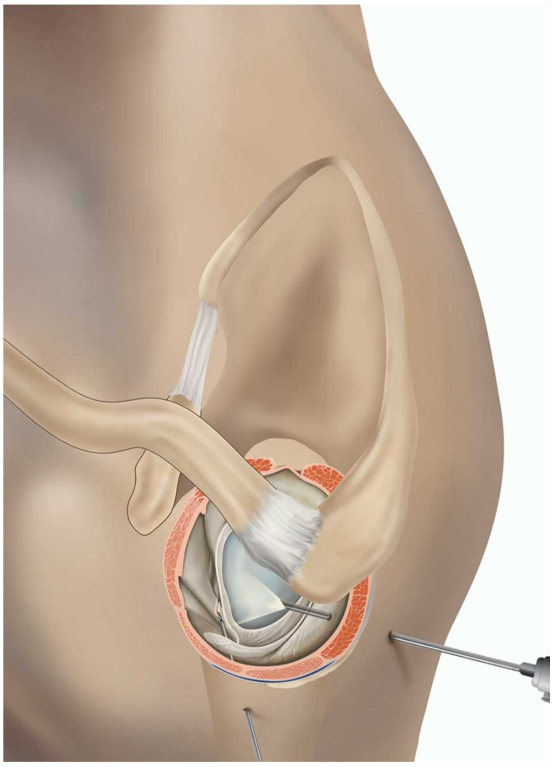

An arthroscopy of the shoulder

Most people have a major improvement but it takes time for pain to lessen and movement to increase. Symptoms often come back with time.

Summary

An arthroscopy of your shoulder allows your surgeon to diagnose and treat problems affecting the joint, without the need for a large cut on your skin. This may reduce the amount of pain you feel and speed up your recovery.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

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