



Duke Orthopaedics: Upper Extremity Division

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Arthroscopic Capsular Release

What is a Frozen Shoulder (adhesive capsulitis)?

A frozen shoulder is due to scarring and thickening of the ligaments and other supporting structures (capsule) of the shoulder. This results in restricted range of motion that is frequently painful.

How do you release the capsule?

The capsule will be released by making small poke holes around the shoulder and using an arthroscope (tiny camera) to see all the structures of the joint. Special tiny instruments allow Dr. Klifto to cut the capsule and restore range of motion.

Length of Stay

Occasionally you will stay overnight to start range of motion exercises. In most cases this is done as an outpatient surgery. You will need to have someone who can stay the entire length of the procedure and take you home with the plan of it being an outpatient procedure.

Anesthesia

Patients usually have two types of anesthesia for this surgery. The first is general anesthesia, which means you are asleep. The second type of anesthesia is a nerve block with sedation so you will not remember the procedure. Your arm will be numb and will feel very strange. The nerve block will last approximately 12 hours or 2-3 days depending on the type of block used. The anesthesiologist will speak to you on the day of surgery. The ultimate choice of anesthesia technique is up to you and your anesthesiologist.

Incisions

You will have approximately 3 small incisions around your shoulder. They will only be about 1 cm long.

Pain Control

You will have pain medication prescribed for you prior to discharge. After the nerve block wears off you will have post-surgical discomfort, so start your pain medicine when the block begins to wear off. Most of the pain is related to your very swollen shoulder. That swelling should improve greatly in the first 24-48 hours after surgery.

Diet

The combination of anesthesia and pain medications can cause nausea in some patients. If you are prone to nausea or show signs of nausea prior to discharge, a prescription for an anti-nausea medication will be provided. You may wish to advance your diet slowly the day of surgery to avoid exacerbation of nausea. Surgery and the narcotic pain medications are very constipating. Your diet should include plenty of water, fiber, fresh fruits and vegetables.

Sling

Your arm will be placed in a sling prior to leaving the operating room. The sling is only for your comfort and protection while your arm is numb if you got a nerve block. You do not need to wear the sling all the time. In fact, it is critical that you begin stretching and moving your arm as soon as possible to prevent the released capsule from healing back in a tightened position. The earlier you can get rid of the sling the better.

Dressings

You will go home with gauze dressings on your shoulder. After 3 days you may remove the dressings. There will be small black sutures (stitches) that will be taken out at your first post-operative appointment approximately 14 days after your surgery.

Physical Therapy

For the three months of recovery you will do aggressive stretching at home. A physical therapist will teach you the four exercises prior to discharge from the hospital. A set of stretches must be completed every hour while awake. Your shoulder will be sore after surgery, but the first few days-weeks after surgery are the most critical for stretching. If a CPM (constant passive motion) machine is ordered, you must use it as much as possible while awake. The CPM machine DOES NOT take the place of stretching. Every hour you must come out of the machine and complete a set of stretches.

Restrictions

Recovery from capsular release surgery is three months. During that time you will have restrictions on the use of your operative arm. Depending on your job most patients are able to return to work with restrictions after 6 weeks. Most importantly, you need to be able to stretch at work.

Pictures

Dr. Klifto will take photos during your surgery. Please bring those pictures to your first post-operative visit. Dr. Klifto or his PA Katie will review them with you and discuss exactly what was done in your shoulder