

## **The 7 Most Important Questions to Ask Your Shoulder Surgeon.**

Shoulder pain can have a dramatic impact on your quality of life. Shoulder surgery can remove pain and restore function, but the decision to proceed with shoulder surgery should be made carefully. Here are 7 questions to ask your shoulder surgeon before proceeding with surgery.

### *1. Can You Try Physical Therapy First?*

This question is tied in with question two. If there is minimal risk to having shoulder surgery later, why not try a conservative approach to treating your shoulder problem. Many patients will not require shoulder surgery.

### *2. What is the risk to not performing surgery now? What could happen if you wait six months? One year?*

The question is whether avoiding surgery for 6 months or a year will compromise the long-term outcome. This issue needs to be discussed with your physician. For example, what if you have a rotator cuff tear. What is the likelihood that your rotator cuff tear will progress and worsen without surgery? Will your tear remain stable? Will your muscles atrophy and become unable to be repaired?

This is also a particularly good question for individuals under the age of 30 who are considering surgery due to a shoulder dislocation. Often the goal with shoulder dislocations in the young is to stabilize the shoulder before they experience repeated dislocations.

### *3. What are the alternatives to shoulder surgery?*

A conservative approach to treatment of the shoulder should be employed whenever possible. As already stated, many patients will not require shoulder surgery. In addition to physical therapy, anti-inflammatories, injections, and education may be enough to obtain an acceptable recovery. For example, while a rotator cuff tear may not heal, many patients still obtain good long-term function after a period of rehab.

### *4. What is your expected length of recovery? How many days will you be in the hospital after surgery?*

This question needs to be asked so that you can plan your life and manage your expectations. The recovery from a typical shoulder surgery can be quite lengthy. Specifically, you should ask your surgeon:

*Recovery Sub-Questions:*

- a. *Will you need full-time or part-time care? If so, for how long?*
- b. *How long will you be in a sling?*

You may be in a sling for 4 to 6 weeks. Your restrictions may continue for up to 6 months. So, it is important that you and your family are prepared from a mental standpoint.

- c. When can you expect the shoulder to be pain-free?
- d. When can you lie on the operative side?
- e. When can you drive?
- f. When can you return to work?
- g. When can you return to sporting activities?
- h. How soon can you resume housework, gardening etc.?

5. *How many procedures do you perform every year? How many surgeries of this type have you done?*

You should ask your surgeon what they specialize in and how many surgeries of this type they have done yearly and in total. Volume is associated with outcome. Surgeons who perform a procedure more often have lower complication rates and better outcomes than those who do so less often.

6. *What are the risks of complications and what is your complication rate? Will the shoulder heal?*

If possible, you should try to find out the general complication rate for your surgery. You can then compare it to the surgeon's specific complication rate for that surgery. If you are undergoing repair of a rotator cuff you should find out the expected chance of it healing after surgery.

7. *If you are going to undergo shoulder joint replacement surgery, you should ask these specific questions.*

- a. What is the implant made of? Will you set off metal detectors at the airport?

- b. How long will your joint replacement last?
- c. What can you do to help keep your joint replacement working as long as possible?
- d. What activities or factors could make your joint replacement wear out more quickly.