



**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR SHOULDER,
ELBOW AND SPORTS
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**Guidelines for Returning to Weightlifting Following
Shoulder Surgery**

Before initiating any type of weight training, you must have full range of motion of the shoulder and normal strength of the rotator cuff and scapular muscle groups. Your motion and strength should be tested by your surgeon before beginning any weightlifting regimen.

The following illustrates the approximate time table for beginning weight training following your particular surgery:

Rotator Cuff Repair:	6 months
Bankart Repair:	3 months
Labrum Repair:	4-6 months
Arthroscopic Subacromial Decompression:	4-6 months

When beginning a weight training program, you should start with low weights and with 3 sets of 15-20 repetitions. The high repetition sets will ensure that the weights you are using are not too heavy. NEVER perform any weightlifting exercise to the point of muscle failure. Muscle failure occurs when the muscle is no longer able to provide the energy necessary to contract and move the joints involved in the particular exercise. When muscle failure occurs, the risk for joint, muscle and tendon injuries is greatly increased.

Exercises to AVOID:

1. Triceps Dips
2. Chest Flies
3. Pull-downs behind the neck
4. Wide grip bench press
5. Triceps press overhead
6. Standing lateral deltoid raises

Exercises to perform with CAUTION:

1. Pull downs should only be done in front of the head, to the chest, with a medium (not wide) grip.
2. Shoulder press overhead should be done carefully, avoiding heavy weights. If doing shoulder presses, always start with the hand in front of the shoulder and end overhead where you can still see your hand. For persons using barbells, this is the "military press".
3. When performing a chest press, it is safest to do so with dumbbells rather than a barbell (bench press) because with dumbbells you recruit your stabilizer muscles. Strengthening your stabilizers will increase your overall functional strength. However, if you insist on bench pressing, your grip should be no wider than the width of your shoulders. Avoid any exercises using grips wider or narrower than shoulder width.



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4. When doing Incline bench press with barbells, there is a danger of shoulder dislocation if the lifter loses control of the bar when returning the barbell to the rack of the incline bench. Always have a spotter for removing and replacing the barbell in this exercise.
5. Lateral deltoid raises should be avoided because of the impinging and wearing effect on the rotator cuff. Forward raises in the “thumb-up” position are usually safer and can be done with reasonable weights. Lateral raises from the prone or bent over position can be done as a substitute for standing lateral deltoid raises.
6. If you are doing any type of “chest-fly”, keep in mind the following precautions. Avoid doing a chest-fly with dumbbells, always use cables. Do not do any chest-fly exercise with straight elbows. Always allow the elbows to bend and never lower your hands below the level of your chest.
7. If you are using a “Pec-Deck” machine, never let the weight stretch the arms so that your elbows pass behind your chin. You can set the arms on this machine a few clicks forward to adjust the maximum motion allowed.
8. For triceps exercises, triceps push-downs on a pulley system are safe as well as bent-over triceps extensions. Avoid doing any type of triceps dips.
9. When doing the upright-rowing exercise, keep your grip at least 12 inches apart. When pulling the bar upward toward the chin, do not raise the bar higher than the point at which the elbow reaches shoulder level.

Usually Problem-Free Exercises:

1. Biceps curls
2. Triceps extensions/kickbacks
3. Cable and bent-over rowing
4. Shoulder shrugs
5. Shoulder band exercises

It is important to continue your shoulder band exercises at least once a week to help maintain the progress you have made following your surgery. If your goal is returning to high level weight training, it will take 3 to 6 months of cautious, gradual progression to return to top form. In general, avoid increasing the amount of weight lifted by more than 10-15% (at a time) of your present working weight every 10-14 days.

****Remember: Weight training is beneficial to improve muscular strength and protect the joints from injury. If done improperly by using too much weight and/or improper technique, weight training can cause serious injury and harm.**