

SHOULDER

Shoulder Arthroscopy

Shoulder arthroscopy is a type of keyhole surgery used to look inside and treat problems in the shoulder joint. Instead of a large incision, the surgeon makes small incisions and uses a tiny camera (an arthroscope) along with special small instruments. The camera sends images to a screen so the surgeon can see and repair the shoulder.

Why it might be recommended

Shoulder arthroscopy is typically considered for ongoing shoulder pain or problems that haven't improved with rest, physical therapy, or injections, including:

- Rotator cuff tears
- Shoulder instability or dislocations
- Labral tears (such as Bankart or SLAP tears)
- Impingement or bursitis
- Frozen shoulder
- Removal of loose tissue or bone spurs

What happens during the procedure

The surgery is done under general anesthesia. Two to four very small incisions are made around the shoulder, and the camera is inserted to inspect the joint. The problem is treated at the same time — for example, repairing a tendon or trimming damaged tissue — and the incisions are closed with stitches or adhesive strips. Surgery usually takes 30 minutes to two hours depending on what needs to be done, and most patients go home the same day.

Recovery

After surgery, your arm will usually be in a sling, with some pain and swelling normal for the first few days, managed with medication and ice. Physical therapy is essential for recovery, starting gently and increasing over time to restore movement, strength, and function.

Return to activities (approximate)

- Desk work: 1–2 weeks
- Driving: 2–6 weeks
- Light activities: 6 weeks
- Sports or heavy lifting: 3–6 months

Recovery depends on what was repaired during surgery.

Benefits

Smaller scars than open surgery, less pain and stiffness, faster recovery in many cases, good outcomes for pain relief and function, and the ability to diagnose and treat problems in the same procedure.

Possible risks

Serious problems are uncommon, but risks include infection, bleeding or swelling, stiffness, ongoing pain, temporary nerve irritation, and rare blood clots. Your surgeon will explain your individual risks.

Key takeaway

Shoulder arthroscopy is a minimally invasive surgery that allows diagnosis and treatment of shoulder problems through small incisions. With proper rehabilitation, most patients achieve good pain relief and improved shoulder function.