

Reverse Total Shoulder Arthroplasty Protocol

0-2 WEEKS

Things to Avoid:

- No active movement of the shoulder (no lifting the arm yourself)
- No reaching behind your back, no combining reaching backward + inward + twisting your arm inward (this is the main dislocation risk position)
- No lifting anything with the operative arm
- No using the operative arm to push up from a chair or bed
- Avoid wetting the wound/dressings for 2 weeks; no swimming, bath, or spa for 4 weeks

What to Do:

- Wear your sling/immobiliser at all times, except for exercises and showering
- When lying on your back, keep a pillow/towel under your upper arm so your elbow doesn't drop behind your body - you should always be able to see your elbow
- Use ice regularly to manage pain and swelling
- Move your elbow, wrist, and fingers freely to prevent stiffness
- Stay independent with daily activities, walking, and getting in/out of bed using your non-operative arm
- Begin gentle shoulder blade squeezes and pendulum-type hanging movements (no active shoulder motion yet)

2-4 WEEKS

Things to Avoid:

- Continue avoiding the reach-behind-back/twist-inward combination
- Still no active lifting of the arm
- No weight-bearing through the operative arm

What to Do:

- Continue wearing the sling at all times except for exercises and hygiene
- Continue elbow/wrist/hand movement and shoulder blade exercises

- Continue icing and swelling management
 - Keep up with all daily activities using your non-operative side
 - Begin gentle passive range of motion exercises e.g. sliding tea towel on table top etc.
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4-6 WEEKS

Things to Avoid:

- Continue dislocation precautions (reaching behind back/twisting in)
- Avoid pushing, pulling, or jerking movements
- No lifting objects with the operative arm yet

What to Do:

- Begin gentle isometric exercises (muscle activation without moving the joint)
 - Begin active-assisted range of motion - using your other arm, a stick, or a therapist to help move the operative shoulder
 - Sling can typically be weaned around 4–6 weeks (earlier for straightforward cases, later if you had additional tendon work) - your physio will confirm timing
 - Continue icing as needed
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6-8 WEEKS

Things to Avoid:

- Continue dislocation precautions
- Avoid heavy lifting (generally keep to very light loads only)
- Avoid jerking, pushing, or pulling activities
- No weight-bearing through the operative arm yet

What to Do:

- Begin gentle resistance band pulling/rowing type exercises
 - Begin active range of motion exercises (moving the shoulder yourself, without assistance)
 - Continue icing if needed
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8-10 WEEKS

Things to Avoid:

- Continue dislocation precautions
- Keep lifting to light loads only
- Avoid jerking, pushing, or pulling activities

What to Do:

- Begin gentle four-point kneeling / light weight-bearing exercises through the operative arm
 - Continue progressing active range of motion
 - Continue strengthening exercises started in the previous phase
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12+ WEEKS

Things to Avoid:

- Continue to be mindful of dislocation precautions long-term
- Avoid heavy lifting (generally limit to light-to-moderate loads - your surgeon/physio will confirm your specific limit)
- Continue avoiding jerking, pushing, or pulling activities

What to Do:

- Progress to more functional strengthening exercises tailored to your goals (work, hobbies, recreational activities)
- Continue building shoulder strength and control
- Gradually return to light household, work, and recreational activities as guided by your physiotherapist
- Continue your home exercise program independently