

Dr. Scott Levin MD

Somers Orthopedic Surgery and Sports Medicine Group

Repair of Subscapularis Tendon Tear

General Goals

- Protect the surgical repair (especially from resisted internal rotation or excessive external rotation)
- Restore passive, then active ROM
- Progress to functional strength and overhead activity

Phase I: Protection & Passive ROM (Weeks 0–6)

Goals:

- Protect repair
- Minimize pain and inflammation
- Begin passive ROM (without stressing subscapularis)

Precautions:

- No active internal rotation
- No external rotation beyond 30° (protects repair from excessive stretch)
- Shoulder sling with abduction pillow worn 4–6 weeks (except for exercises and hygiene)
- Avoid lifting, pushing, or pulling

Interventions:

- Elbow, wrist, and hand AROM

- Passive shoulder ROM only:
 - Forward flexion to $\sim 90-120^\circ$ (as tolerated)
 - External rotation to $\sim 30^\circ$ with arm at side
- Pendulums
- Scapular retraction and setting
- Pain and edema control (ice, positioning)

Phase II: Active ROM & Early Strengthening (Weeks 6–12)

Goals:

- Achieve near full active ROM
- Begin light strengthening (excluding internal rotation early on)

Precautions:

- No resisted internal rotation until after week 10–12
- Avoid overpressure into external rotation

Interventions:

- Discontinue sling
- Begin active-assisted → active ROM in all planes
- Gradually progress ER to $\sim 45-60^\circ$ at side
- Begin light isometrics (ER, elevation, scapular stabilizers)
- Gentle rhythmic stabilization drills
- Initiate submaximal internal rotation isometrics around week 10

Phase III: Strengthening Phase (Weeks 12–20)

Goals:

- Restore strength, endurance, and neuromuscular control
- Normalize scapulohumeral rhythm

Interventions:

- Progressive resistance exercises:
 - Theraband for IR, ER, flexion, abduction
 - Closed chain shoulder stabilization
 - Prone scapular strengthening
- Begin internal rotation strengthening (e.g., Theraband IR, cable machine)
- Functional reaching, lifting mechanics
- Begin light sport-specific movements (e.g., golf swing, light tennis swings)

Phase IV: Return to Activity/Sport (Week 20+)

Goals:

- Return to full function and sport-specific activities
- Prevent reinjury

Interventions:

- Plyometrics (chest pass, overhead throws)
- Overhead strengthening
- Aggressive IR/ER and multidirectional strengthening
- Throwing or return-to-sport progression (overhead athletes)

Typical Timeline

Time Post-Op	Activities
0-6 weeks	Sling, passive ROM only
6-10 weeks	Active ROM, no IR resistance
10-12 weeks	Initiate IR strengthening
12-20 weeks	Progressive strengthening
5-6 months	Return to full activity/sport