



## **Weight Training After Shoulder Surgery**

*Adapted from James Bradley, MD*

You should not return to training with weights on either weight machines or using barbells until your surgeon determines that it is allowed. In general, the following timetable illustrates when it is safe to return to weight training following your particular surgery:

- |                             |                   |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| • Rotator cuff repair       | <b>6 months</b>   |
| • Bankart repair            | <b>4 months</b>   |
| • SLAP repair               | <b>4-6 months</b> |
| • Subacromial decompression | <b>4-6 months</b> |
| • Capsular release          | <b>3 months</b>   |

Prior to initiation of a weight training program, you should have no pain, full range of shoulder motion and normal strength of the rotator/scapular muscles. **Your motion and strength will be tested by your surgeon or physical therapist before you start a weight training program.**

When starting your weight training program, start with 3 sets of 15-20 repetitions. Training with high repetitions sets ensures that the weights you are using are not too heavy.

**Never** perform any weight training exercise to the point of muscle failure. Muscle failure occurs when, in performing a weight training exercise, the muscle is no longer able to provide the energy necessary to contract and move the joint(s) involved in the particular exercise. Joint, muscle and tendon injuries are more likely to occur when muscle failure occurs.

**The following weight training exercises should be avoided:**

- 1. Pull downs behind-the-neck (wide-grip)**
- 2. Behind-the-neck shoulder press**
- 3. Wide-grip bench press**
- 4. Standing lateral deltoid raises**
- 5. Triceps press overhead**
- 6. Dips**



The following exercises require special cautions (consider delaying until 1 year after surgery):

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 only be done carefully, avoiding heavy weights. If doing shoulder presses, always start with the hand in front of the shoulders and end overhead where you can still see your hand. For persons using barbells, this is the “military press.”
3. If **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 (use light weights and dumbbells while lying on the floor initially to avoid hands from going below the level of the chest).
4. **Lateral deltoid raises** should be avoided due to 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.
5. 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.
6. If you are doing any type of “**chest-fly**” keep in mind the following precautions:
  - Do not do any chest-fly exercise with straight elbows
  - Always allow the elbows to bend and never lower your hands (holding dumbbells) below the level of your chest (use floor to perform exercise initially).
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 extension, **triceps push-downs on a pulley system** are safe as well as bent-over triceps extensions.
9. When doing **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.



**Exercises that are usually problem free:**

- 1. Biceps curls (at 3 months)**
- 2. Cable and bent-over rowing**
- 3. Shoulder shrugs**

If your goal is returning to a high level of 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 muscle 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.