



UNDERSTANDING YOUR SURGERY

Shoulder Tendon Transfer

Overview

A tendon transfer restores movement to a shoulder with an irreparable rotator cuff tear by moving a working muscle and its tendon to take over the lost function. Commonly performed transfers include a lower trapezius transfer (which always requires a donor allograft tendon to reach the bone) or a latissimus dorsi transfer. The transferred muscle is re-trained over time to power the shoulder, improving the ability to lift and rotate the arm.

About Your Procedure

Why this surgery is recommended

- An irreparable rotator cuff tear in a younger or active patient
- Loss of external rotation or overhead function not suited to other surgery
- A shoulder not yet arthritic enough to need a joint replacement
- To restore movement and reduce pain while preserving your own joint

What happens during surgery

- An incision over the back or side of the shoulder
- The chosen muscle (lower trapezius or latissimus dorsi) is released with its tendon
- A lower trapezius transfer always requires a donor (allograft) tendon to reach the bone
- The tendon is secured to the humeral head with anchors; nearby nerves are protected
- General anaesthetic; hospital stay usually one to two nights

After Your Surgery

- Shoulder protected in a brace, often in slight outward rotation, for **6 weeks**
- The transfer must be protected early — only assisted movement at first
- Physiotherapy begins gently and progresses slowly to re-train the muscle
- Learning to activate the transferred muscle takes time and patience
- No driving for **6 weeks** after surgery

Important precautions:

- The transfer is fragile early — follow brace and movement restrictions strictly for 6 weeks
- Re-training the transferred muscle takes months of consistent physiotherapy
- Improvement is gradual and may continue developing for up to 12 months
- A donor (allograft) tendon is screened tissue, always used to extend a lower trapezius transfer
- Report any sudden loss of the movement you had regained, or a sudden pop, promptly

Your Recovery at a Glance

WEEKS 0-6

Brace on. Protected position.
Assisted movement only

WEEKS 6-12

Active movement begins.
Muscle re-training starts

MONTHS 3-6

Progressive strengthening
and motor re-education

MONTHS 9-12

Continued strengthening;
functional gains often
improve up to a year

QUESTIONS YOU MAY WISH TO ASK

- ? What does my recovery look like for my job or sport?
- ? What are the main risks, and how likely are they for me?
- ? What pain relief will I need, and for how long?
- ? When can I return to work, and is travel safe early on?

MY NOTES
