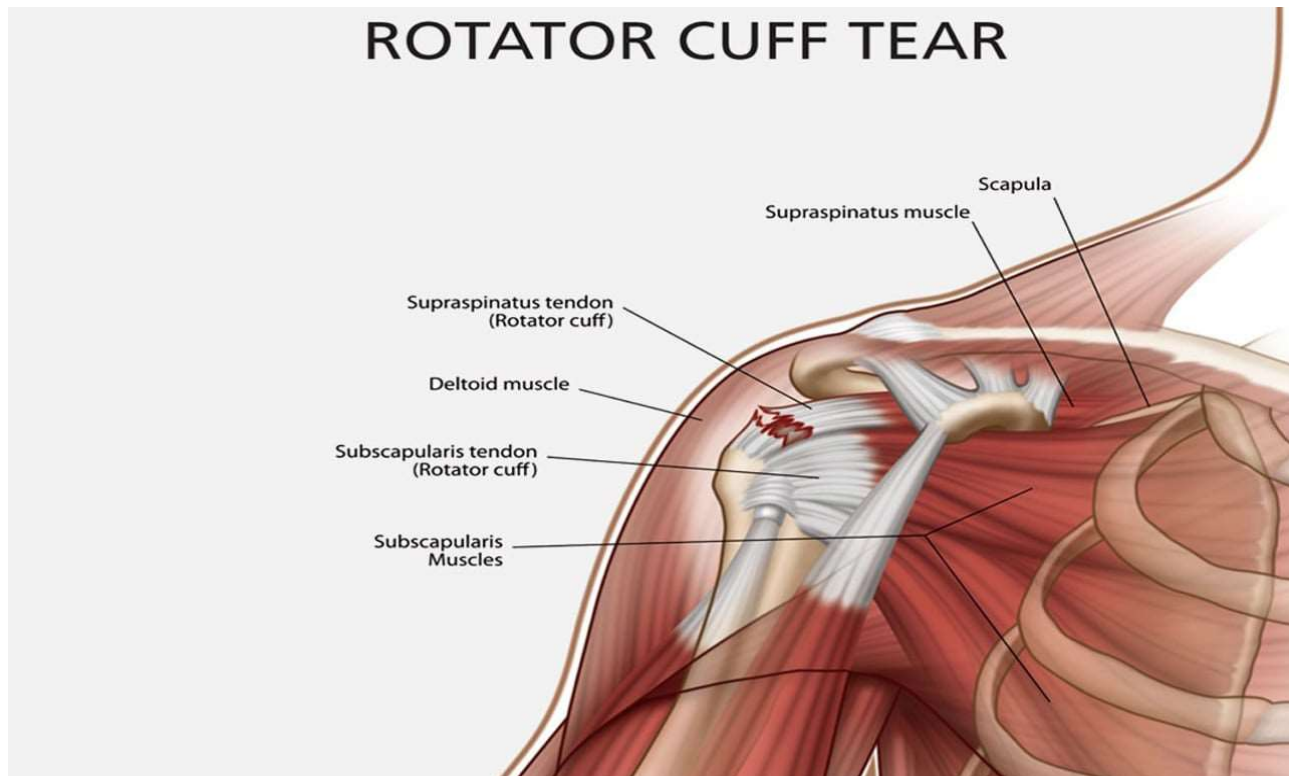


# Rotator Cuff Tears

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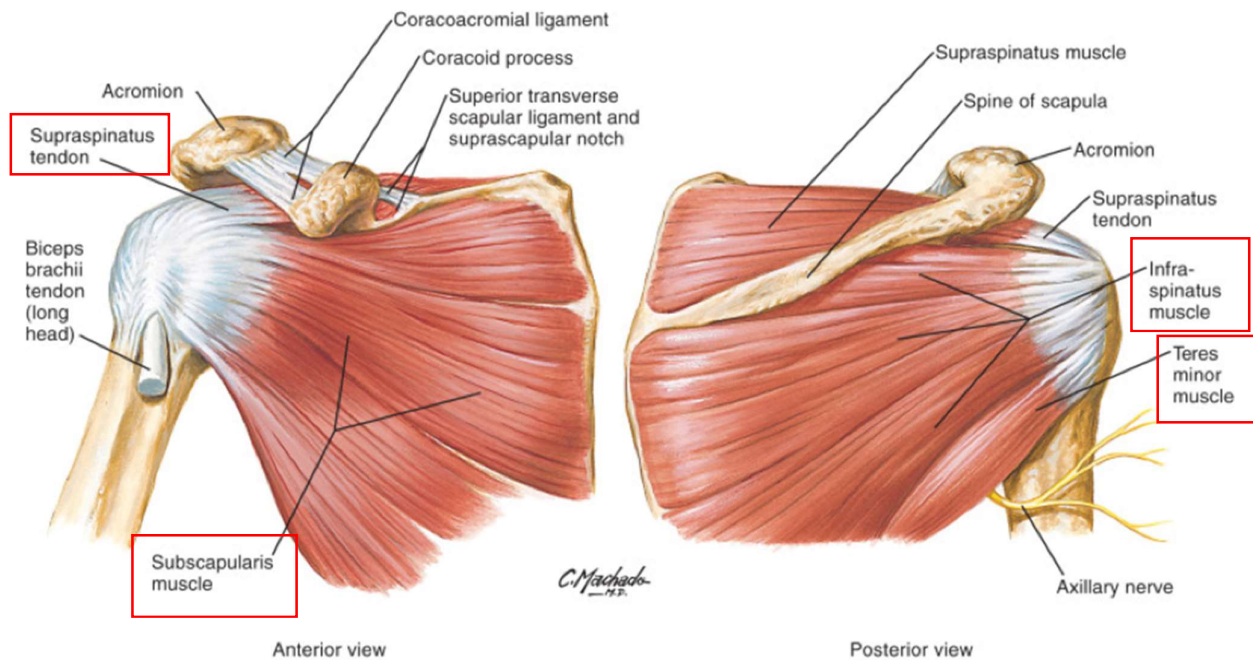
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## Anatomy/Description

The shoulder joint is a remarkably complex structure that allows a wide range of arm movement and power when it is functioning properly.

The rotator cuff is composed of four tendons that connect the muscles of the shoulder blade (scapula) to the upper arm bone (humerus) as shown in the picture.

Tears most commonly occur at the insertion, where the tendon joins the muscle to the bone.



## What Causes Rotator Cuff Tears?

Rotator cuff tears can occur in tendons weakened by age, inflammation, disease, trauma and repetitive strain injury.

Rotator cuff tears can occur in younger people especially following sudden, major trauma.

## Types of Rotator Cuff Tears.

Tears can range from a partial tear in one tendon to complete tears of one or more tendons.

- **Partial Tear-** This is when only some of the tendon fibres are torn. This weakens the tendon and causes significant discomfort, but the arm can still move relatively normally. Partial tears usually occur as a result of overuse but can occur due to injury.
- **Full Thickness Tear-** Over time, a partial tear can worsen and go through all the layers of the tendon to become a full thickness tear. A larger tear cause more weakness and pain. Depending on its location, a full thickness tear can lead to a complete rupture of the tendon, and the tendon completely tears off the bone.

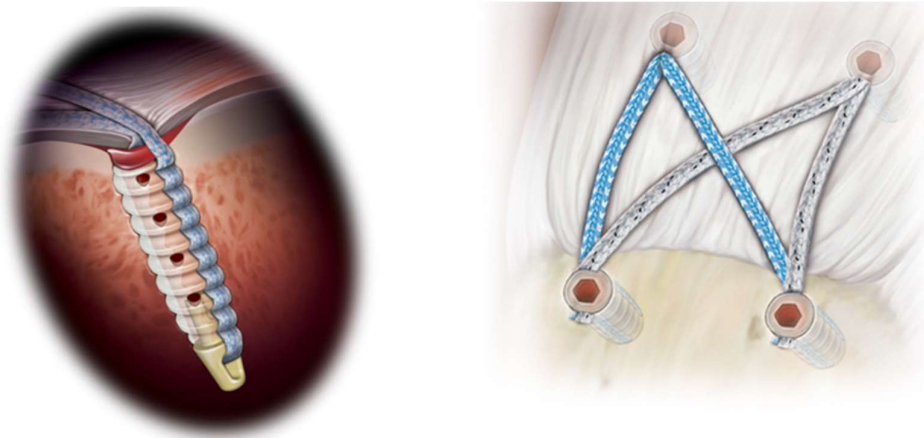
## **Symptoms.**

- Weakness and discomfort
- Pain
- Immobility in severe tears.

## **Surgical Treatment.**

Dr Dao performs the surgery arthroscopically, otherwise known as key-hole surgery. This is done through several small incisions less than 1cm long.

The arthroscope is a thin instrument containing a miniature video camera and light. It is inserted through a small incision in the shoulder. Using small instruments Dr Dao is able to trim the edges of the tendon and remove fragments of torn cuff tendons. Small bone spurs can be removed to stop further damage to the tendon. The tears in the tendons are then repaired using suture anchors. They are small and strong anchors, with sutures attached, which are fixed into the bone. These suture anchors are made of a synthetic material that does not cause any adverse reactions by the body. The stitches are then passed through the torn end of the tendon and tied down to the anchors.



The wound will be closed with skin stitches and small adhesive dressings.

An ice pack is often applied in recovery to help defuse swelling and ease pain. Your arm will be placed in a sling or shoulder immobilizer.

## **Recovery and Follow Up After Rotator Cuff Repair.**

As soon as possible following surgery you should start moving your fingers, wrist and elbow. A post-operative appointment will be made for you to see Dr. Dao in approximately 14 days. Your sutures will be removed at this consultation. An exercise program is important to your recovery and begins soon after your surgery. After six weeks, Dr. Dao will remove your sling and start with gentle exercises that gradually help you regain shoulder movement. You should not push, pull or lift anything more than a glass of water. You should not be driving a motor vehicle for 3 months. At 3 months following surgery, you will start stretches that are intended to restore movement and exercises to strengthen the muscles. You will learn ways to avoid shoulder problems in the future. Dr. Dao will advise you about return to work and normal activities.

Recovery takes time and depends on the type of surgical repair. It usually takes several months (possibly up to a year) for strength and comfort of your shoulder to return.

## **Frequently Asked Questions.**

### **Q: Will the tear heal by itself?**

A. A full thickness tear is unlikely to heal by itself because this area of the tendon has a low blood supply, so the healing is slow. Normal daily movement of the muscles constantly pull on the tendon, pulling the edges of the tear further apart and limiting the amount of healing that can occur.

### **Q: Will I need surgery to repair the tear?**

A. Surgery will be required to repair the tear in the majority of cases. However in some patients, rotator cuff tears cannot be repaired.

### **Q. Is there any risks associated with the surgery?**

A. All surgery has risks. Dr. Dao will discuss this with you, including but not limited to anaesthetic risks, the risk of wound infection or deeper infection which may require further surgery, slow healing, re-tear of the tendon, the risk of bleeding and stiffness in the shoulder. There is also a risk of the damage to nerves and blood vessels close to the surgical area. Surgery cannot improve the strength of tendons. The repaired tendon may not heal or may heal incompletely.

### **Q. Will the pain and discomfort in my shoulder resolve?**

A. The pain and discomfort will probably take many months to resolve. In unusual cases the pain may not resolve over the long term.

### **Q. What do I do if there is severe pain, discharge, increased swelling, worsening flexibility, inability to move the shoulder or any urgent concerns after surgery?**

A. During business hours, please contact the rooms on 8078 0633 or outside business hours please attend your local emergency department.