



Possible Complications of Shoulder Surgery

Modern shoulder surgery is extremely safe but all surgery has some degree of risk. Despite the highest standards of surgical practice complications are possible. It is important that you have enough information about possible side effects to fully weigh up the benefits and risks of surgery. The vast majority of people having shoulder surgery will not have complications. The following possible complications are listed to inform and not to alarm. There may be other possible side effects that are not listed.

General risks of Surgery

Pain and discomfort around the incisions

Wound hematoma (accumulation of blood/fluid around surgical site)

Wound infection – thankfully very uncommon around the shoulder, especially following arthroscopy (keyhole surgery). Usually manifests as increasing pain, swelling and redness around the wound(s). Treatment with antibiotics and/or further surgery may be required.

Nausea/Vomiting – especially in the first 48 hours

Constipation/Diarrhea – may persist for a few days following surgery

Allergic reaction (to antibiotics, antiseptics, sutures, dressings)

Extremely uncommon life threatening conditions such as major blood vessel injury, deep venous thrombosis and cardiac arrest (heart attack) can be associated with surgery and anaesthesia.

Specific risks of Shoulder Surgery

Pain – initially can be quite severe, and generally takes time to settle following shoulder surgery. Very occasionally pain can persist, even without a specific cause.

Nerve injury – more common after open shoulder surgery, especially shoulder replacement surgery. In shoulder replacement surgery abnormal nerve symptoms can be present in up to 30% patients post-operatively, but are usually minor and tend to recover with time.

Stiffness – recovery of movement is typically very slow following shoulder surgery, and tends to occur over months rather than days or weeks. Approximately 5% of patients may develop a true frozen shoulder, which may slow recovery of motion even further and may require a cortisone injection into the joint. Very rarely a permanent restriction of shoulder movement may occur.

Failure of the surgery – very occasionally shoulder surgery does not result in the outcome it was intended to. Sometimes this is the result of a failure to heal of the repair (failure of biology), or may be due to a new injury to the shoulder. However the cause can be multifactorial and a specific cause may not be found.

Report to your Surgeon

Temperature > 38.5 degrees, or night sweats/chills

Increasing pain, swelling, or redness in the shoulder

Wound drainage or bleeding (some oozing of arthroscopy portal sites expected)

Persisting numbness/tingling/pins and needles after the arm block has worn off

Remember

Serious complications are thankfully very uncommon after shoulder surgery and occur in less than one patient in 100.