

Koh KH, Lim TK, et al. Effect of Immobilization without Passive Exercise After Rotator Cuff Repair Randomized Clinical Trial Comparing Four and Eight Weeks of Immobilization. JBJS Am 2014;96:e44(1-9).

Design: Randomized clinical trial

Study question: In patients undergoing arthroscopic repair of rotator cuff tears, does a postoperative rehabilitation program using four weeks of passive immobilization lead to clinical outcomes different from those of a program with eight weeks of passive immobilization?

Reasons not to cite as evidence:

- Rehabilitation after repair of rotator cuff repairs generally involves early or immediate passive range of motion activities and graduated active exercises after a variable period of immobilization
- This immobilization period is based upon custom derived from the days of open rotator cuff repairs and not on arthroscopic repair
- There is uncertainty about the effects of early passive mobilization after arthroscopic repair, and about whether better outcomes would occur if the shoulder is immobilized without any passive ROM activities until several weeks have passed
- Early mobilization of the shoulder is suspected to increase the rate of re-tears
- The current study compares re-tear rates in groups which were immobilized in a sling for either four or eight weeks
- This design misses an opportunity to answer the most relevant question, which is whether weeks of immobilization, whether four or eight, represents an improvement over prevailing practice of earlier mobilization
- The study therefore does not present a comparison which could lead to recommendations to alter existing practice patterns