Potential Complications--Rotator Cuff Surgery

Arthroscopic rotator cuff repair is a very successful procedure to relieve pain and improve function of the shoulder. Complications are relatively uncommon considering the complexity of the surgery. The following is a list of some of the potential complications:

1. Infection occurs in less than 1% of patients. The majority of these are superficial and can be treated with local wound care and antibiotics. Patients with diabetes or weak immune systems are more prone to develop infections.

2. Stiffness. This is much less common with arthroscopic surgery than with open surgery but does occur, especially if a large tear must be reattached down to the bone. This usually is worked out with physical therapy.

3. Nerve or blood vessel injuries. These are extremely rare with arthroscopic surgery.

4. Failure to achieve full strength or function of the shoulder. This can depend somewhat on the size and chronicity of the tear.

5. Complications due to general medical conditions. Prior to surgery your primary medical doctor will help to get you as healthy as possible.

6. Complications due to anesthesia. Your anesthesiologist will review all the risks of anesthesia with you before surgery and address any concerns.

7. Re-tear or failure of healing of the rotator cuff.

While complications are rare, sometimes further surgery can be required if any of these occur. In almost all cases, arthroscopic rotator cuff surgery will result in good improvement in pain and function. If a complication does occur, every effort will be made to ensure a good result. The full healing time for the surgery can take up to a full year, depending on the size of the tear or condition of the shoulder.