

Wearing a sling

A well-fitted sling rests the operated arm and protects the repair while the soft tissues heal. The forearm should sit roughly horizontal, with the elbow tucked in and the hand free to wiggle.

Kieran Hirpara 4.0



A sling protects your shoulder, elbow, or wrist after surgery by stopping the arm from moving while the repair heals. How long you wear it depends on the operation – your surgeon will tell you specifically.

How to wear it

The sling should support your forearm with your elbow bent at about 90 degrees. The strap goes around your neck and across the back. The hand should sit slightly higher than the elbow, never hanging below it. If your fingers look swollen or feel pins-and-needles, the sling is probably too tight or your arm is hanging too low – reposition and tell your physiotherapist.

Most slings are designed to keep the arm close to the body. Some are abduction slings (with a small pillow or wedge) that hold the arm slightly away from the body – these are heavier but ease the load on a repaired rotator cuff.

Sleeping in a sling

The first one to two weeks are usually the hardest. Many patients find it easier to sleep semi-reclined in a recliner chair or propped up on pillows in bed. Lying on the operated side is uncomfortable; lying on the other side often works with a pillow tucked under the operated arm to support it.

If pain wakes you, take pain relief about 30 minutes before bed and place a small pillow between the elbow and the body to stop the arm rolling.

When can it come off?

You can usually take the sling off briefly to wash, dress, and do gentle exercises your physiotherapist has prescribed. Your hand and elbow should be moved out of the sling several times a day to stop them stiffening up, even when the shoulder is being protected.

Hygiene

The sling itself can be hand-washed in warm soapy water; let it air-dry. A fresh cotton T-shirt under the sling is more comfortable than skin-to-strap contact. Keep the wound dry until your surgeon says otherwise.

When to call us

- The hand becomes cold, blue, or numb that doesn't go away when the sling is loosened
- Severe pain that pain relief doesn't touch
- Fever or wound problems