



STURDY
MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Reforms In Rotator-Cuff Surgery

James Snead, MD, Sturdy Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Associates

Years of wear and tear from movements such as tennis serves and golf swings, or a single traumatic accident, can cause rotator-cuff injuries. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, a tear to the rotator cuff, which is the group of muscles and tissues that hold the upper arm bone in place and enable the arm to lift and rotate, is the most common cause of pain and disability among adults. Dr. James Snead, a Board Certified Orthopedic Surgeon at Sturdy Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Associates, performs minimally invasive rotator-cuff surgeries to repair these injuries with less pain.

Rotator-cuff tears are caused by either chronic or acute injuries. “A tear could be caused by an abnormal force on a normal tendon, such as a direct fall on the shoulder, or by a normal force on an abnormal tendon, such as constant use of an injured rotator cuff,” says Dr. Snead. “Patients who experience shoulder pain, weakness, stiffness, or night pain should seek medical attention. When patients have pain they can’t live with, they shouldn’t wait to have something done.”

According to Dr. Snead, “With non-operative treatments such as the use of anti-inflammatories, cortisone injections, physical therapy, and activity modification, the majority of patients do get better. But for someone who has failed all non-operative treatments, surgery is necessary, as full thickness rotator-cuff tears—meaning the tendon is completely torn—seldom heal on their own.”

Unlike many surgeons who still treat rotator-cuff injuries with open surgery, Dr. Snead performs nearly all of his rotator-cuff surgeries arthroscopically. Using three or four 1-centimeter incisions, and a fiberoptic scope connected to a TV monitor for visualization, he repairs the tear underneath the skin. This minimally invasive, outpatient procedure is less detrimental to the skin, tissues, and tendons. Dr. Snead only performs open surgical repair on total shoulder surgeries, when a complex tear or arthritis requires joint reconstruction or replacement.

“Arthroscopic surgery is easier on the patient than open surgery, causing less pain during the recovery period,” says Dr. Snead. “Though the average time for the tear to heal, which is about six weeks, is the same as with open surgery, patients feel better sooner. Patients can feel better within a week or two after the procedure, so I have to remind them that they need to hold back from doing certain things, as the injury is still healing.”

Dr. Snead recommends that patients who are considering rotator-cuff surgery should find out whether arthroscopic surgery is an option for them, and whether their surgeon performs them. “If you’re not comfortable with the answers, don’t be afraid to get a second opinion. And patients don’t need to look far to find the right treatment. Cutting-edge techniques and surgeons who perform them are right here in our own community.”

Dr. Snead is accepting new patients. Appointments can be made by calling (508) 226-2213. The practice also offers x-ray and physical therapy services. Most insurance plans are accepted.

Sturdy Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Associates is one of 13 practices that make up Sturdy Memorial Associates (SMA). All of its physicians are associated with Sturdy Memorial Hospital.