

*News from
Washington
Health*

New Hope for People With Torn Rotator Cuffs

*Expert Shoulder Surgeon
Offers Innovative Fix*

If you or someone you know has suffered a torn rotator cuff shoulder injury, you likely know the debilitating pain and diminished range of motion that can come with it. Now, there is an exciting minimally invasive surgical option for certain irreparable rotator cuff tears whereby a biodegradable balloon implant (called a subacromial balloon spacer) is inserted above the rotator cuff in a minimally invasive fashion, arthroscopically. This innovative new procedure is being performed with consistently good outcomes by one of the first U.S. orthopedic surgeons to adopt it – and the good news is, he is right here in Northern California.

Renowned orthopedic surgeon John Costouros, MD, FACS, FAAOS, with Washington Health's Institute for Joint Restoration and Research, has spent the past 20 years dedicated to shoulder repair and replacement, serving patients in the Bay Area and beyond. He is board-certified by the American Board of Orthopedic Surgery and possesses a certificate of added qualification in Sports Medicine. Dr. Costouros has done extensive clinical research and traveled the world to participate in the development of the most advanced shoulder surgical techniques and devices.

"Rotator cuff tears are the most common issue affecting patients who

seek out a shoulder specialist, and 50% of the population over the age of 60 will suffer from this condition," explained Dr. Costouros. "I describe rotator cuff tendons like car tires. With more age, mileage, wear and tear, the ligaments get thinner, and like a pothole can puncture an old tire, falling onto an outstretched arm can tear a rotator cuff tendon."

The rotator cuff is a group of muscles and tendons in the shoulder that surrounds the shoulder joint. It provides stability for the joint, helps lift and rotate the arm, and allows for a wide range of motion. The rotator cuff keeps the ball of the upper arm bone, called the humerus, in the shoulder blade socket, called the glenoid. Rotator cuff tears occur when tendons pull away from the bone or tear, either as a result of overuse or injury. When the tendons age and become thinner, a tear can occur from something as normal as reaching from the driver's seat to the backseat of your car for a bag. Symptoms include shoulder pain, weakness in the arm, a clicking or popping sound in the shoulder, and pain during sleep or with daily activities. The pain might feel like a dull ache deep within the shoulder and can radiate down the upper arm to the elbow.

Conservative treatment for rotator cuff tears usually includes physical therapy, anti-inflammatories, or injections. For more structural problems,



patients may require surgery to solve the problem. Before the FDA cleared the InSpace subacromial balloon spacer implant in 2021, surgeries for the treatment of massive irreparable rotator cuff tears included superior capsular reconstruction, tendon transfers, and total joint replacements. These procedures typically require four to six weeks in a sling to begin an intensive four- to six-month rehabilitation period.

With the subacromial balloon spacer implant procedure, Dr. Costouros makes a few small incisions for the arthroscope (a small tube with a high-definition camera and monitor). The scope and surgical tools are inserted into the shoulder joint to position the balloon implant. Once in place, the balloon is inflated with saline to create a cushion. This cushioning helps intact shoulder muscles function more effectively, offers greater pain relief, and enables

patients to start physical therapy sooner. Typically, a sling is used for comfort for a week or so and rehabilitation takes no more than three months.

"The subacromial balloon spacer has been a game changer for select patients with irreparable rotator cuff injuries who fit certain criteria," said Dr. Costouros, who has performed approximately 100 of these procedures. "Good candidates have an intact subscapularis tendon and minimal arthritis." To learn more about the subacromial balloon spacer procedure and hear one woman's success story, see this page in next week's Tri-City Voice.

For more information about Dr. Costouros and the Institute for Joint Restoration and Research, go to WashingtonHealth.com/IJRR or scan the QR code below.

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—John Costouros, MD

