



Elderly get patch for rotator cuff

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FOR THE ELDERLY, having a torn shoulder rotator cuff can mean chronic pain, with little hope of lasting relief.

Now, however, the head of orthopedics at Forest Hills Hospital has developed a procedure that is giving elderly patients with previously inoperable rotator cuff tears new hope.

Dr. Richard Seldes has developed a method to repair severely damaged rotator cuff tissue by inserting a collagen patch that combines with the patient's own tissue and enhances healing through minimally invasive surgery.

"These are patients who may have been told, 'Your rotator-cuff tear is too big. We can't repair it,'" Seldes said. "They are most likely older patients with poor tissue, or someone who has had chronic tears and several previous surgeries."

This special type of patch actually becomes the patient's own tissue over the course of several months, and is only used on patients who have been told there are no other options, Seldes said.

Although arthroscopic rotator cuff surgery and the use of the collagen patch to replace damaged tissue have been around for years, Seldes said that the two procedures were not combined in the past. Generally, he explained, rotator cuff repairs were done using open incisions of about four to six inches, and left large scars on the shoulder.

With the new method, the patch is put in through an incision of less than a half-inch.

A tiny camera — inserted through another small incision about the width of a pencil — allows surgeons an ideal view of the internal shoulder structure, he said.

"Because the camera allows us to see everything, we can use very small instruments, and smaller incisions," the orthopedic surgeon said.

"I had an operation on my shoulder several years ago, which my surgeon at the time couldn't fix completely," said Essie Dorsey, 66, of Springfield Gardens, who recently underwent the new procedure. The repair lasted a while, but this past fall, Dorsey reinjured the same shoulder.

"It was a bad tear. I tried physical therapy, but I was told there was no way to really fix the shoulder," she said.

Dorsey added that she was in so much pain that she was willing to try just about anything. When told about the new procedure, she jumped at the chance.

"I had nothing to lose. I was willing to try anything to get my shoulder back to as normal as possible," she said. "I'm so glad I had this operation. I have about 90% use of my arm back."

Seldes warned, however, that the new procedure is not an instant fix.

"As with any surgery, there are always some risks involved," he said. "And, because it's performed on patients who are older, or with poor tissue structure to begin with, the recovery time can range from four to six weeks in an immobilizer, plus an additional three to six months of physical therapy."

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