Sub-acromial decompression
Advice after surgery

The shoulder
The shoulder is a ball and socket joint. An arch is formed above the shoulder by a bone called the acromion. The collar bone (clavicle) meets the shoulder blade at a small joint (the acromioclavicular joint) which lies above the main shoulder joint.

The shoulder joint is surrounded by a deep layer of tendons (the rotator cuff) which pass under the arch of bone. One of these tendons (the supraspinatus) sometimes swells and rubs on the bone and surrounding structures causing a painful shoulder. The bone may respond to this stress by forming a spur. The acromioclavicular joint can also be a source of shoulder pain after injury or arthritis.

When you lift your arm up it reduces the space under the arch. The rubbing causes further swelling of the tendon on the acromion bone. If the acromioclavicular joint is irritable then lifting your arm up high causes it to be squeezed and this too is painful.

Surgery
If the cycle of rubbing and swelling is not broken by time, rest, physiotherapy and cortisone injections then surgery may be necessary.
The surgical procedure is called a subacromial decompression. The operation aims to increase the space around the tendons and reduce the pressure on the tendons.

**After Surgery**

**What to do about the wound** - your stitches will be removed approximately two weeks after surgery. This may be done by your GP or at the orthopaedic department.

**The first few weeks** - follow your surgeon’s advice regarding activity levels in the first few weeks. This normally includes avoiding heavy lifting. However, do not be frightened to start moving the arm as pain allows. Gradually the movements will become less painful.

**When to return to work** - returning to work will depend on the type of work that you do and your surgeon will advise you when to return to work. A sedentary job with minimal arm involvement may allow you to return to work after a few weeks. The majority of people return to work within six weeks of the operation. Heavy manual workers may require a longer period of rehabilitation.

**When to return to leisure activities** - this will depend on you surgeon’s advice, pain, movement and strength. When starting an activity it is best to start with short sessions involving little effort and then gradually increase the effort or time of the activity.

**Pain**

It is not unusual to feel pain in your shoulder after the operation, usually this decreases in the first few weeks after surgery, however for some patients this can take up to 3 months to resolve. Full recovery of your shoulder symptoms usually takes place within 6 months (for 80-90% of people) although there may be improvements for up to 1 year.

The use of pain relief such as medication, heat and or ice can be beneficial. Please view our information on inflammation and management of swelling.

After the operation and stitches have been removed, you should exercise the arm frequently throughout the day. The arm may feel sore whilst you are doing the exercises but there should be no intense or lasting pain. Aim for three exercise sessions per day but if your pain lasts for more than 30 minutes after you have finished do less with you next exercise session.

**If your operation has included a tendon repair then your surgeon or physiotherapist will prescribe exercises that are specific to your operation. In this case do not use the following exercises.**
Exercises

1. Pendulum exercise

Stand leaning forward. Gently swing your arm backwards and forwards, from side to side and in small circles.

2. External rotation

Lie on your back and keep your elbow tucked into your side throughout, use a stick or broom handle to assist your arm turning out.

3. Arm Over Head

Lie on your back and with your unaffected arm try and get your arm back.
towards the pillow or floor

**Physiotherapy**
You may benefit from a physiotherapy assessment if the advice given in this leaflet has not changed your symptoms.

**If any of the exercises or advice in this leaflet causes your symptoms to worsen please stop the activity and seek advice from your doctor.**