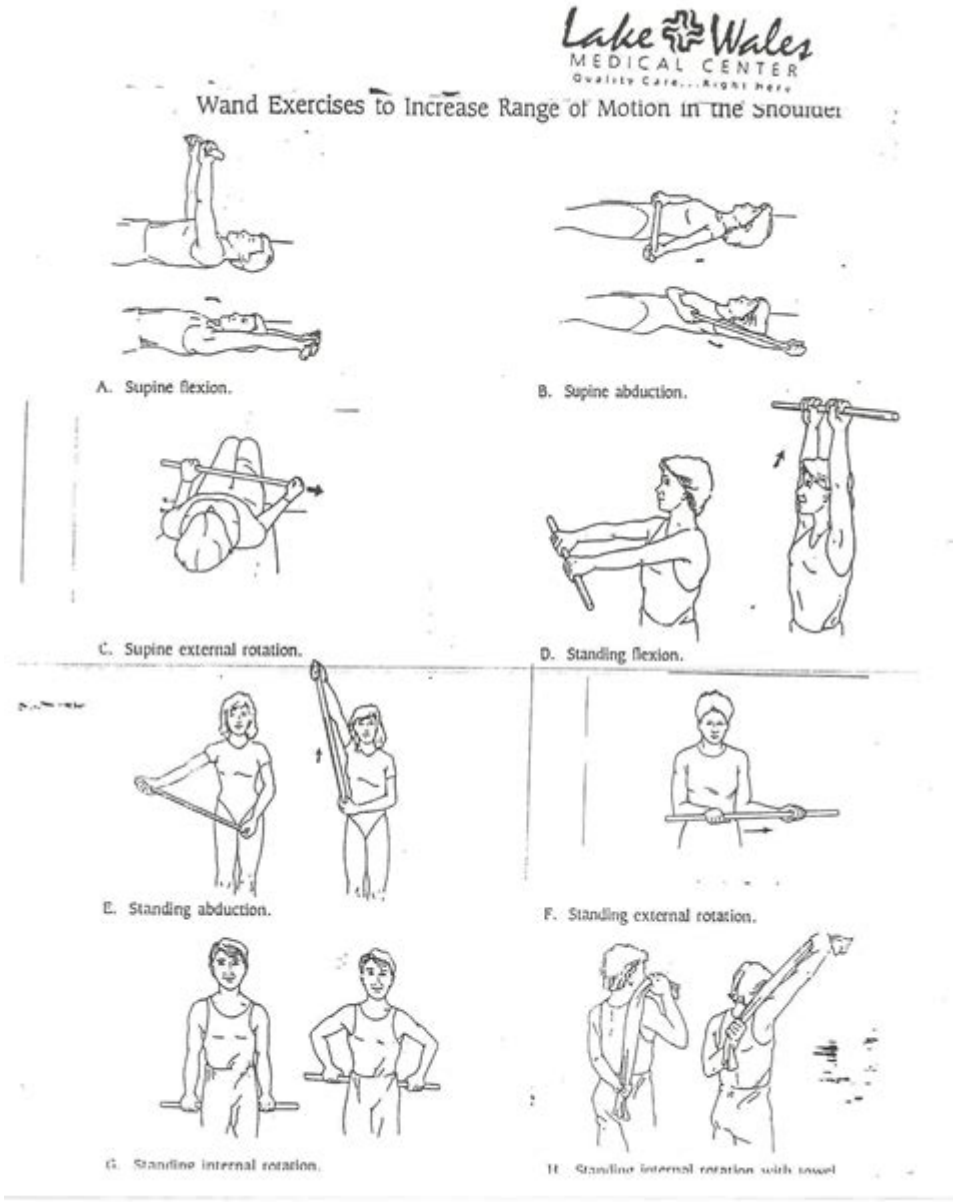
Proximal Humerus Fracture Physical Therapy Exercises



Proximal humerus fracture physical therapy exercises play a crucial role in the rehabilitation process for individuals who have sustained this type of injury. Proximal humerus fractures, which occur near the shoulder joint, often result from falls, sports injuries, or direct trauma. Such fractures can lead to pain, limited range of motion, and weakness in the shoulder, making it essential for patients to engage in specific rehabilitation exercises to restore function and strength. This article will explore the types of proximal humerus fractures, the importance of physical therapy, and a detailed outline of effective

exercises to aid recovery.

Understanding Proximal Humerus Fractures

Proximal humerus fractures are categorized based on the severity and type of break. They can be classified as:

- Non-displaced fractures: The bone cracks but retains its proper alignment.
- Displaced fractures: The bone fragments are misaligned.
- Comminuted fractures: The bone is shattered into multiple pieces.

These injuries may also involve damage to surrounding soft tissues, including muscles, tendons, and ligaments, which can complicate recovery. Understanding the nature of the fracture is vital for developing an effective rehabilitation plan.

Importance of Physical Therapy

Physical therapy is integral to the recovery process following a proximal humerus fracture. The goals of physical therapy include:

- Pain management: Reducing discomfort through various modalities.
- Restoration of range of motion: Improving flexibility and movement in the shoulder joint.
- Strengthening: Rebuilding the muscles surrounding the shoulder to support the joint.
- Functional training: Teaching patients how to perform daily activities without pain or restriction.
- Preventing complications: Reducing the risk of stiffness, frozen shoulder, or long-term disability.

Engaging in a structured physical therapy program under the guidance of a licensed physical therapist is essential for optimal recovery.

Timeline for Rehabilitation

The timeline for rehabilitation following a proximal humerus fracture can vary based on the severity of the fracture and the individual's overall health. Generally, the timeline can be broken down into phases:

Phase 1: Initial Recovery (0-6 weeks)

- Focus on pain management and protection of the injured area.
- Limited range of motion exercises may be introduced as tolerated.

Phase 2: Early Rehabilitation (6-12 weeks)

- Gradual increase in active range of motion exercises.
- Introduction of strengthening exercises as healing progresses.

Phase 3: Advanced Rehabilitation (12 weeks and beyond)

- Continued strengthening and functional activities.
- Sport-specific or work-related activities can be reintroduced as appropriate.

Physical Therapy Exercises for Proximal Humerus Fracture

The following exercises are commonly included in a physical therapy program for proximal humerus fractures. It is crucial to consult with a physical therapist before starting any exercise regimen, as they

can determine the appropriate timing and modifications based on individual circumstances.

Phase 1: Initial Recovery Exercises

During this phase, exercises should be gentle and focus on maintaining mobility without placing stress on the healing bone.

1. Pendulum Exercises
- Stand or sit, leaning forward slightly.
- Let the affected arm hang down.
- Gently swing the arm in small circles or back and forth for 1-2 minutes.

2. Elbow Flexion and Extension
- Sit or stand with your arm at your side.
- Slowly bend your elbow, bringing your hand toward your shoulder.
- Extend the arm back to the starting position.
- Repeat 10 times.

3. Passive Range of Motion
- Use the unaffected arm to move the affected arm gently through its range of motion.
- Focus on movements like shoulder flexion, abduction, and external rotation.

Phase 2: Early Rehabilitation Exercises

As healing progresses, patients can begin to engage in more active exercises to regain strength and mobility.

1. Wall Climb
- Stand facing a wall, placing your fingertips on the wall at waist height.

- Slowly "climb" your fingers up the wall as far as comfortable.
- Hold for a few seconds, then slide back down.
- Repeat 5-10 times.

2. Shoulder Flexion with a Stick
- Hold a long stick (or a broom handle) with both hands.
- While keeping the elbows straight, use the unaffected arm to lift the stick upward, raising the affected arm overhead.
- Slowly return to the starting position.
- Repeat 10 times.

3. Isometric Shoulder Exercises
- Stand or sit with your affected arm at your side.
- Press the palm of your hand against a wall for 5-10 seconds.
- Relax and repeat 5-10 times in different directions (forward, backward, and to the sides).

Phase 3: Advanced Rehabilitation Exercises

Once the initial healing has occurred, and the patient is cleared by a healthcare professional, the following strengthening exercises can be introduced.

1. Resistance Band External Rotation
- Attach a resistance band to a stable object at waist height.
- Hold the band with the affected arm at your side, elbow bent to 90 degrees.
- Rotate the arm outward, keeping the elbow close to your body.
- Return to the starting position and repeat 10-15 times.

2. Shoulder Abduction with Weights
- Stand with a light dumbbell in the affected hand.
- Raise the arm to the side until it is parallel to the ground.

- Slowly lower it back down.
- Repeat 10-15 times.

3. Scapular Retraction
- Stand or sit with good posture.
- Pull your shoulder blades back and down as if you are trying to pinch them together.
- Hold for 5 seconds and release.
- Repeat 10-15 times.

Additional Considerations

- Consultation with a Physical Therapist: Always consult a qualified physical therapist before initiating any exercise protocol. They can tailor a program specific to the individual needs of the patient.
- Pain Management: If pain increases during exercises, it is essential to stop and consult with a healthcare professional.
- Gradual Progression: Exercises should be progressed gradually. If an exercise becomes too easy, discuss increasing resistance or difficulty with your therapist.

Conclusion

Proximal humerus fracture physical therapy exercises are vital for restoring function and strength after injury. With a structured rehabilitation program that progresses through various phases, individuals can regain their range of motion and return to their daily activities. By following the guidance of healthcare professionals and engaging in appropriate exercises, patients can effectively navigate their recovery journey and minimize the risk of complications. Remember, patience and consistency are key components of a successful rehabilitation process.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the initial physical therapy exercises for a proximal humerus fracture?

Initial exercises often include pendulum swings and passive range of motion (ROM) exercises to promote movement without stressing the healing bone.

How long after a proximal humerus fracture should physical therapy begin?

Physical therapy typically begins shortly after the injury, often within a few days, depending on the doctor's recommendations and the stability of the fracture.

What is the goal of physical therapy for a proximal humerus fracture?

The primary goals are to restore range of motion, improve strength, reduce pain, and enhance functional activities of daily living.

Are there specific stretching exercises for shoulder flexibility post-fracture?

Yes, gentle stretching exercises such as wall slides and doorway stretches can help improve shoulder flexibility as healing progresses.

How important is strength training in the rehabilitation of a proximal humerus fracture?

Strength training is crucial in the later stages of rehabilitation to rebuild muscle strength around the shoulder joint and improve stability.

What precautions should be taken during physical therapy for a proximal humerus fracture?

Patients should avoid any exercises that cause pain, ensure proper form, and follow the therapist's guidelines to prevent re-injury or complications.

When can I return to sports or physical activities after a proximal humerus fracture?

The timeline for returning to sports varies by individual but generally occurs 3 to 6 months after the injury, once strength and range of motion are adequately restored.

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Recover effectively with proximal humerus fracture physical therapy exercises. Discover how to regain strength and mobility in your shoulder today!

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