

Does Age Really Matter

Carolina Tiago Afonso

Orthopedic Surgeon (Shoulder and Elbow Surgery.), Head of the Bragança Traumatology Unit at ULSNE, Portugal

Sara Sabim

Orthopedic Surgeon, Traumatology Unit at ULSNE, Portugal

Abstract:

Background: Age has traditionally been considered a negative prognostic factor for rotator cuff repair and has often influenced surgical decision-making. However, advances in arthroscopic techniques and postoperative rehabilitation have challenged this paradigm, raising the question of whether elderly patients can achieve outcomes comparable to those of younger individuals.

Purpose: To evaluate the influence of age on clinical outcomes following arthroscopic rotator cuff repair.

Methods: A retrospective cohort study was performed including consecutive patients who underwent arthroscopic rotator cuff repair by a single shoulder surgeon between 2020 and 2025. Patients were stratified into three age groups: <55 years, 55–70 years, and >70 years. Demographic characteristics, comorbidities, tear morphology, tendon involvement, imaging findings, repair technique, and associated procedures were recorded. Patients with irreparable tears not amenable to repair were excluded from the final analysis. Clinical outcomes were assessed using the Visual Analog Scale (VAS) for pain and functional outcome categories preoperatively and at final follow-up. Complications and reoperation rates were documented

Results: A total of 106 patients met the inclusion criteria, with a mean follow-up of approximately 10 months. Patients in the older age groups presented more frequently with larger tears, higher tendon retraction grades, and greater fatty infiltration. Nevertheless, all age groups demonstrated substantial clinical improvement following surgery. Mean pain levels decreased markedly from the preoperative period to final follow-up, and the vast majority of patients achieved Good, Very Good, or Excellent functional outcomes regardless of age. Complication and reoperation rates remained low across all groups. Although older patients exhibited more advanced tear characteristics at presentation, age was not

Conclusion: Arthroscopic rotator cuff repair provides significant pain relief and functional improvement across all age groups. Despite presenting with more advanced tear pathology, elderly patients can achieve clinical outcomes comparable to those of younger individuals. Chronological age alone should not be considered a contraindication to arthroscopic rotator cuff repair, and treatment decisions should instead be individualized according to functional demand, tissue quality, and patient expectations.