

SARAH - GETTING READY FOR SHOULDER REPLACEMENT SURGERY

My name is Sarah Young and you may think that this listing on our pottery website (www.vanhollowpottery.com) seems like an unusual place for information about upcoming shoulder surgery...it is....however we have the website and it is really important to me to have this information published and readily available... So here it is...

In 2019 I began to experience shoulder pain and thinking it was arthritis and just a fact of getting old, I requested from my primary care physician (PCP)...[Andrew Lueders, MD – a great physician and wonderful human]... the opportunity to have an x-ray in order to he could make a referral to a physical therapist to strengthen weakening muscles, etc. To my shock and horror the x-ray showed severe osteoarthritis, etc., etc. My PCP suggested that I get an MRI which was required before I could even think about seeing an orthopedic specialist. The MRI provided a source of further horror as my PCP and I read the 2 page readout...Long story short, it was time to talk to an orthopedic surgeon.

I cannot recommend highly enough Wesley K. Cox, MD and his staff including Kelly Pruett, APRN, CNP – all based in Northwest Arkansas, USA. They were all phenomenal! and, now, Andrew Schween, DPT and the rest of the 201 TRM physical therapy group are fantastic and I have a functioning shoulder again!

I also have extreme gratitude for my husband, Jim, and our dog, Skipper, ...both have been incredibly supportive throughout.

However, that's "after-the-fact" to the surgery. So here's the before....

As I learned that surgery was probably inevitable if I wanted to have a good working shoulder, Dr Cox's office always encouraged me to ask any questions that I might have. The problem was that **I had no idea what questions to ask!**

I know that physicians and other professionals must cringe at the notion of us "laypeople" searching the Internet for answers... but I did it anyway! I was fortunate enough to discover, through Amazon, two books written by Michelle Conway discussing preparing for total shoulder replacements. Her story was similar to mine. Her books (re: Conway, Michelle. Two Total Shoulder Replacements: - an (Im)patients View) as well as her blog (<https://shoulderreplacementblog.com>) were borne out of her personal insights suggesting how to best prepare for this upcoming surgery. Michelle lives in England and was a wonderful source of information. I've sent her this writing and she's given permission to publish it.

I had never had any major surgery before ...much less something as daunting as a total reverse shoulder replacement... So if that "adventure" is on your upcoming horizon, I invite you to take a look at Michelle's A to Z hints and tips below. Those areas that appear in "blue" are some of my own findings and I have also taken the liberty of translating some of her English into American for any American reader. **Of course, it goes without saying that these are just two individuals' experiences/opinions and definitely Do Not Rely on anything as absolutes – these are just suggestions....and if you have any specific questions, please, always, make sure that you contact your medical professionals. They are the experts and our circumstances are all different!**

So I hope this helps and if you have any questions feel free to contact me. – vanhollow@yahoo.com.

It has now only been less than four months since my reverse shoulder replacement. Physical therapy and doing the exercises are absolutely key... Dr. Cox did a phenomenal job... and I find that I'm dealing with much fewer limitations than I could have possibly imagined.

A to Z of Hints and Tips

A **AMAZON** – sells [just about everything....](#)

ANTICIPATION - if you are overly nervous, can't sleep, etc. anticipating surgery – talk to your PCP and see if anti-anxiety or other medicines could help.

B **BATHROOM** – look at bathroom carefully. Would a temporary grab handle help get in and out of shower/bath? Do you need an additional non-slip mat in shower?

BEDDING – duvets [and comforters](#) can be heavy. Would you be better with a sheet plus a light fleece blanket? [If using a recliner cot-sized mattress pads and fitted sheets are available and make it feel a lot cozier – check the dimensions before ordering.](#)

C **CLOTHING** – easy to put on and take off – [items that button or snap in front are great!](#) Cloak or [cape](#) for a coat if winter.

D **DENTIST** – have a dental check up to ensure no loose fillings or crowns – [after surgery I was told to wait 8-9 months before regular dental procedures.](#)

DENTAL FLOSS – [can't do it one-handed – use tiny dental brushes or floss sticks](#)

E **EARRINGS** – loop ear-rings (studs won't work).

EATING – learn to use cutlery with your 'other' hand. [...in fact try to learn to do everything with your non-affected hand.](#)

EXERCISE – follow instructions from physio ([Physical Therapist](#)) - don't over-do it!

EYELASH and eyebrow tint – [if this is something you do, then do it](#) before surgery.

F **FRONT-FASTENING BRA** – no explanation needed!

G **GETTING UP** – practice getting out of a chair and out of bed [using your "good" hand or not using any hand at all.](#)

H **HAIR** – consider getting hair cut short – if you can bear it... or use a hairband. [If you color your hair, do it before surgery.](#)

I **ICE** – Ice, Ice, Baby – before and a lot after op. ICE BAND (or Polar Cubes)– can be purchased from several online retailers or may be purchased by the surgeon. Insurance may not cover it, but its invaluable! You can use frozen 4oz or 8 oz. bottles instead of ice cubes – it makes it last longer. Keep a “back-up” set in the freezer so you can constantly have a frozen ice source in the machine as needed. Also if the machine does not have an on/off switch, consider plugging it into an easily accessible, dedicated power strip that can be turned on/off when changing the frozen bottles and water.

J **JOGGING BOTTOMS** – elasticated waist or size bigger – loose fitting.

K **KITCHEN** – use pre-prepared or frozen vegetables or meals from supermarket. If food or meals can be delivered – use this option also.

L **LEARN** – to do tasks with the opposite hand, especially if surgery is on dominant shoulder.

M **MEDICATION** – if you are taking regular medication, put enough into containers for at least two or three weeks to avoid having to push pills out of foil packets. Check with your PCP and the surgeon’s office as to when/or if to stop any medications or supplements. Only if there are no children in the house, consider leaving the tops of containers loose – its impossible to open a child-proof container with only one hand.

MOISTERIZE – skin on shoulder to ensure that skin is not too dry, and lower legs which will get very dry whilst wearing the surgical stockings if required for any length of time. Check with the surgeon as to applying any moisturizer on the scar after it is healed. Also a travel size container that flips open is easier to hold and open than a larger one with a screw-type lid.

N **NIGHTWEAR** – needs to be considered as you will be wearing the sling in bed at night so I advise that you wear a nightshirt (or pyjamas -pajamas) with a collar to stop it rubbing your neck, button-up will be easier for the first week or so.

NIGHT LIGHTS - light sensitive nightlights avoid any dangerous stumbling in the middle of the night.

O **OUTDOORS** – wear sling for the first few weeks until you are advised that it is no longer needed; take care travelling on buses or public transportation – check with the surgeon’s office as to how long to wear the sling.

P **PILLOWS** – a soft pillow vertically on operated side to rest shoulder/elbow in sling and ensure you don’t turn onto the shoulder during sleep – a recliner might be much better.....but fair warning! – I never could get comfortable!

PRACTICE – all tasks normally done with other hand at least four weeks before operation e.g. wiping ‘important little places’, putting on lipstick, brushing teeth and drinking cups of coffee. Also pay attention to those tasks that require two hands – i.e. dental floss – and create ways to do it one-handed.

Q QUESTIONS – don't be afraid to ask questions, physio ([surgeon, physical therapists](#)) consultant or any other medical staff.

R ROTOR CUFF – this is very fragile, beware of sudden sharp movements.

[REACHER/GRABBER TOOL](#) makes it easier to pick up items.

S SHIRTS – which button up the front, are great for the first couple of weeks when you may find it difficult to get dressed.

SHOES – slip on shoes or boots with zips ([zippers](#)) are much easier than laces.

SHOULDER PULLEY – [If prescribed by your physical therapist](#) - use for exercise post op and can be purchased from Amazon.

SHOWER – consider a shower cape, wound dressings are waterproof but additional protection might be considered. [Use a hand towel to dry – larger bath towels are heavy.](#)

SKIRTS – may be easier to wear instead of trousers (toilet visits).

STAIRS – practice going up and down the stairs using only one arm – handrail will be on the wrong side at some point.

T TRAVELLING – in car: use a small hand towel ([or removable padded strap](#)) under seat belt if it has to go over the operated shoulder – or sit in the back of the car on the opposite side. [If on a plane or train, consider hand luggage with wheels...if anything needs to go in the overhead compartment, get help!](#)

[TOOTHPASTE](#) – buy some with a flip top – much easier than having to screw top off.

U UNDERWEAR almost impossible to wear without help, go bare if you dare!

USELESS and UPSET – is how you may feel, its expected and its temporary – [rely on and appreciate any caregivers you may have!](#)

V VANITY – no chance, you will look and feel like a ragamuffin for at least a couple of weeks.

W WELL DONE – congratulate yourself on achieving every small milestone, you will feel better.

WIPES – face wipes, deodorant wipes and toilet wipes – very handy.

X X-RAYS – if you are curious, ask to see your before and after x-ray's when you attend your post op out-patients' appointment.

Y YOU – will be tired, frustrated and grumpy – live with it, it won't be for long.

Z **ZZZ** – some people find it easier to sleep in a reclining chair in the early days’ post op. If sleeping in bed as normal, more pillows may be required, especially under the operated shoulder.

Hope this helps. Anticipating the surgery is frightening – absolutely – but applaud your courage and as Kelly Pruett, APRN, CNP advised me....its your surgery....you elected to do it....now **OWN IT!**