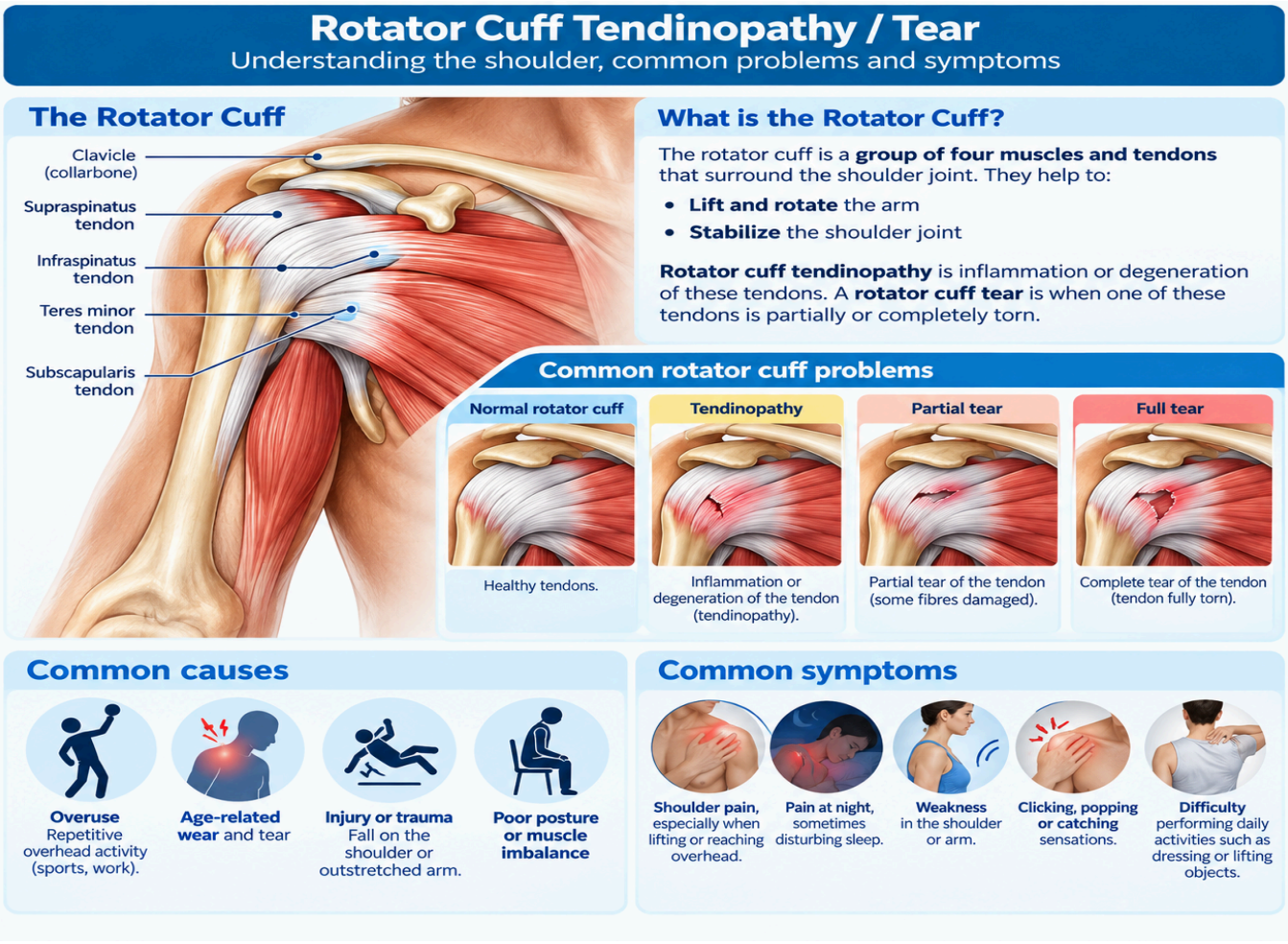
Rotator Cuff Tendinopathy / Tear

Understanding shoulder tendon pain and injury

Rotator Cuff Tendinopathy / Tear

A guide to symptoms, treatment and recovery



What is the rotator cuff?

The rotator cuff consists of four muscles and tendons that help lift and rotate the arm and stabilise the shoulder joint.

Tendinopathy and tears

Tendinopathy involves tendon irritation or degeneration. A rotator cuff tear is a partial or complete tear of one or more tendons.

Common symptoms

Shoulder pain when lifting or reaching overhead; night pain; weakness; clicking or catching; difficulty dressing or lifting.

Causes, diagnosis and treatment

Understanding your shoulder and the options for recovery

Common causes

Repetitive overhead activity at work or in sport; age-related tendon changes; a fall or injury; posture and muscle imbalance.

Diagnosis

A clinician will ask about your symptoms and examine shoulder movement and strength. Ultrasound or MRI may be used when tendon damage is suspected.

1. Activity modification

Reduce movements that aggravate pain. Take regular breaks from repetitive overhead tasks, then gradually resume activities.

2. Pain relief

A wrapped ice pack for 10-15 minutes may help after activity. Discuss suitable pain relief or anti-inflammatory medicines with your clinician.

3. Physiotherapy

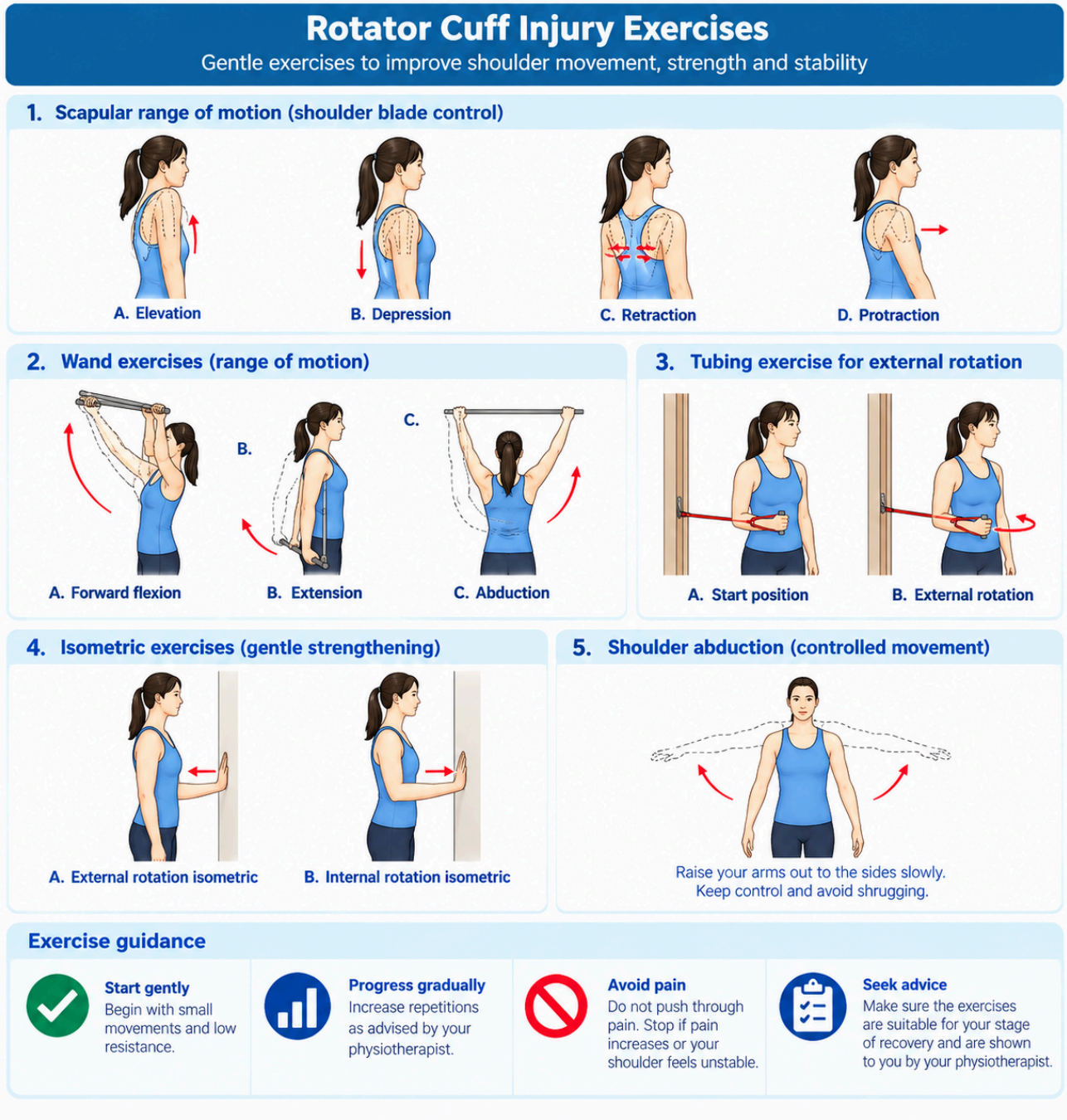
A tailored programme may include mobility exercises, rotator cuff strengthening and shoulder blade control, with gradual progression.

4. Injections and 5. Surgery

An injection may be considered for persistent pain. Surgery may be discussed for certain large tears or ongoing problems despite treatment.

Exercises and rehabilitation

Gentle movements and strengthening with professional guidance



Exercise safely

Start exercises when advised by your physiotherapist. Avoid sharp pain and progress gradually according to your symptoms and strength.

Self-management and next steps

Supporting a comfortable return to daily activities

Manage your activity

Avoid repeated overhead lifting during flare-ups. Return to daily activities gradually and take breaks when needed.

Maintain shoulder comfort

Keep good posture, use wrapped ice after activity if sore, and follow your prescribed gentle shoulder exercise programme.

When to seek medical advice

Arrange a review if pain persists despite physiotherapy, weakness interferes with daily activities, or the shoulder feels unstable.

Recovery outlook

Many people improve with physiotherapy and activity changes. Recovery may take weeks or months, depending on the condition and severity.

Key message

Follow an individual rehabilitation plan and seek clinical advice if symptoms worsen or function does not improve.

B-Well Physiotherapy Services

0300 303 4811

bwell.mskberkshire@nhs.net

www.bwellberkshire.co.uk