



Exercise enthusiast, **Vicki**, is back to teaching fitness classes after a rotator cuff repair.

The Comeback Kid

Rotator Cuff Repair Returns Fitness Instructor to Form

Initially, Vicki ignored the nagging pain in her left arm. After 30 years of teaching fitness classes, she was used to working through injury. But the pain worsened and soon every movement became agonizing. “I couldn’t lift my arm. I couldn’t do any activity. I couldn’t sleep at night. I was miserable,” she says. Her family doctor referred her to David Novak, MD, at Commonwealth Orthopaedics, where an MRI revealed an 80% tear in her left rotator cuff.

Rotator cuff tears are among the most common conditions affecting the shoulder. They involve one or more of the four tendons of the rotator cuff muscle, which surrounds the shoulder joint.

“Rotator cuff tears can occur from either massive trauma – which we see in the younger population – or it can be a chronic attritional problem in the older patient,” says Commonwealth surgeon Gordon Avery, MD. “In the younger and middle-aged patient, surgery is the treatment of choice for a full thickness tear if it is deemed the tendon is repairable. Partial thickness tears often respond to conservative treatment such as physical therapy, NSAIDs and cortisone injections, and heal without surgery.”

For Vicki, who is 60, an arthroscopic rotator cuff repair was the answer. “This surgery is considered when pain, especially night pain, and weakness interfere with activity and cannot be controlled by conservative treatment,” Dr. Novak says. “It’s also a good option for patients such as Vicki, who are highly motivated to return to a very active lifestyle.” In this outpatient procedure, the surgeon makes several tiny incisions, inserts a small camera called an arthroscope, and works with miniature instruments while looking at the rotator cuff on a monitor.

“The minimally invasive arthroscopic procedures we perform today at Commonwealth are the cutting edge of surgical repair of rotator cuffs and offer many advantages to our patients over traditional, open surgery,” says Commonwealth surgeon John McConnell, MD. “Benefits include much smaller incisions, less muscle and tissue trauma, and less pain and bleeding.”

After her successful surgery, Vicki began the long, challenging process of recovery. Even though people warned her it would be difficult, she thought she’d be fine because she was an athlete and

fitness instructor. Instead, she says, "It was the hardest thing I've ever done. I was truly out of commission for the first time in my life."

She spent four weeks in rehab, performing passive range of motion exercises just to move her arm. As her strength and function gradually improved, she progressed to physical therapy and began lifting light weights again at six months. "Vicki was very motivated during her rehabilitation. She was able to regain full motion and strength, and has returned to all her pre-injury activities," Dr. Novak says. These include overhead press with 20-pound weights, and teaching strength, spinning, core conditioning and water aerobics classes at Lifetime Fitness in Centreville.

Vicki recommends Dr. Novak to others and returned to him for knee surgery in July. "I had complete trust in him from the moment I met him," she says. "He was very thorough and explained everything carefully. I was in such bad shape when I went to see him and my recovery was so tough, I never thought I'd be completely okay again. I feel he performed a miracle to get me back to 100%."



Gordon L. Avery, MD, earned his undergraduate degree from Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York, before going on to receive his medical degree from The University of New York at Buffalo, College of Medicine. He then moved to Washington, DC, and completed his internship and orthopaedic residency at Georgetown University Medical Center where he concluded his formal medical training as Chief Resident.



John P. McConnell, MD, earned a BS in Chemistry from Georgetown University in Washington, DC and received his medical degree from Georgetown University Medical School. He then completed a general surgery internship at Northshore University Hospital in Long Island, New York, and returned to Washington to do an orthopaedic surgery residency at Georgetown University Medical Center.



David J. Novak, MD earned a BA in Economics from the University of Pennsylvania and received his medical degree from Georgetown University. He remained in Washington, DC, at Georgetown University Medical Center to complete a residency in orthopaedic surgery. He then completed advanced fellowship training in sports medicine and arthroscopy at the Southern California Orthopedic Institute in Van Nuys, California.

For full biographies and a complete directory of the physicians at Commonwealth Orthopaedics who perform these and other procedures visit our website at www.c-o-r.com.

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