



Complications of Reverse Shoulder Arthroplasty, A Review of Literature

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Abstract

Complications of reverse shoulder arthroplasty have been reported widely, with its utilization in different shoulder pathologies including rotator cuff deficiency, post-traumatic sequelae, revision procedures, failed rotator cuff surgeries, and glenohumeral osteoarthritis. The most common reported complications include instability, infection, notching, loosening, nerve injury, intra-operative fractures, and glenoid failure. Considerations should be taken regarding patient selection, preoperative planning, familiarity with different reverse shoulder prosthetic designs, and surgical technique as per the precise positioning and soft tissue balancing. With all, complication rate can be declined with improvement of functional status along with the increase in longevity of implant. Considering the risk factors of each complication, the operating surgeon can prevent and treat them.

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Introduction

Reverse Shoulder Arthroplasty (RSA) is considered a valuable surgical option for patients with Rotator Cuff (RC) deficiency. Recently, indications have widely expanded to include glenohumeral arthritis, failed RC surgery, previous arthroplasty, or proximal humeral fractures [1,2]. The outcome of shoulder arthroplasty is influenced by many factors related to surgical indication, surgeon's experience, implant design, positioning [3], and postoperative rehabilitation [4].

With the widespread use of RSA, complications abound. The rate of complications is approximately 15%–24% [5,6]. The rate has been declining with the modern advances in prosthetic design and operative techniques. Additionally, the rate differs among studies due to different definitions of complications [7]. The complications can be classified into major or minor, also, as per the side into either humeral side or glenoid side complications, besides infection and neurovascular injuries. This article reviews different complications following RSA, with exhibiting the ways to avoid or to treat such problems.

Complications related to humeral side

I- Prosthetic instability

Prosthetic instability remains one of the most common disabling outcomes after RSA. It represents 4.7 % of total complications [7]. Recently, this incidence declined with modern implants as demonstrated in a systematic review, to account for 0.24% [8]. Arm in at-risk position (adduction, extension, and internal rotation) is the main cause for dislocation in the antero-superior direction (Figure 1) [9]. Instability usually occurs in the first six months, and of whom, half occur in the first three months [10]. Conservative management via closed reduction is often sufficient in half of patient with resultant stable shoulder, whilst recurrent instability usually necessitates one or more revision procedures.

The only guarantee for successful management of such complication is represented in determination of the cause. Early dislocation may follow different circumstances including; previous shoulder arthroplasty (hemiarthroplasty or anatomical total



shoulder arthroplasty) [11,12], the lack of soft tissue tension subsequent to implant malposition, improper version, glenosphere diameter, and mechanical impingement [11-13]. Axillary nerve/deltoid dysfunction, bony deficiency, and Subscapularis (Ssc) deficiency in a medialized-design RSA are also risk factors for instability [11,13].

Proper soft tissue tensioning is a must to increase the exerted compressive forces on the prosthesis, the lateral-medial and superior-inferior tensions should be restored with humeral positioning as regard to the lateral offset of tuberosity-glenoid distance and the vertical offset of acromion-greater tuberosity distance, respectively. Additionally, tensioning may be impacted by different factors related to prosthetic design (glenosphere offsets and size, humeral neck-shaft angle, and insert thickness), and surgical technique (humeral osteotomy level and glenosphere positioning) [14].

Management option should be tailored to the cause. Proper clinical and radiological assessment remain the key success for revision surgery. Implant (humeral or glenoid) mal-version should be rectified after a CT-rotational evaluation [11]. In cases of shorter humeral height compared radiographically to contralateral sound side, the height could be inclined utilizing a thicker liner or metal tray [11,15,16]. Although the more constrained humeral component can enhance implant stability, it might reduce impingement-free ROM [17]. Previous studies reported arm lengthening by 15-20 mm is sufficient to soft tissue tensioning and prosthetic stability [3,11]. If the humeral height is shorter by >15-20 mm to other side, revision of humeral stem using cemented stem or structural bone grafting is advisable [11]. Besides, the glenosphere size might require an upgrade along with inferior placement in patients with a lax soft-tissue envelope, and in those with humeral bone loss to help fill the dead space [14]. In patients with excessively Medialized Center Of Rotation (COR), glenoid lateralization should be planned [11]. If medialization is <15 mm, a larger or lateralized glenosphere can be sufficient [11,16,18]. Nonetheless, in cases with severe glenoid deficiency, surgeon shall consider bony increased offset-RSA (BIO-RSA) [11,12]. In the setting of correctly positioned components and appropriate soft-tissue tension, inferior soft-tissue impingement remains the most likely cause, all soft tissue inferior to the glenosphere approximately the inferior 180°, should be removed at the inferior axillary pouch during revision [19].

On the other hand, a Late prosthetic instability may result after alteration in implant position; this positional change can be caused by humeral stem subsidence or baseplate movement. Serial radiographic evaluation is beneficial for detection of implant loosening and subsidence. Aseptic Loosening on glenoid side is much lower than on humeral side due to the lower resultant torque stress on glenoid side with medialization [11,20], if compared to humeral side which is caused by humeral stress shielding or polyethylene debris of scapular notching [5]. Septic implant loosening usually necessitates two-stage revision.

Regardless the timing of dislocation, the first-line management typically consists of closed reduction followed by a brief period (≤ 6 weeks) of sling immobilization and avoidance of extension, adduction, and internal rotation. Failure to maintain reduction requires further evaluation as aforementioned.

Subscapularis management during RSA is still a matter of debate. Being an important anterior restraint against prosthetic instability in anatomical arthroplasties, its role in RSA has been

extremely studied. Some demonstrated a higher risk of instability with irreparable Ssc, Fracture sequelae, and tumour surgery [21-24]. Similarly, **Boileau et al.** considered the repair in medialized-RSA designs [11-13], however, it's repair is not required in lateralized-RSA design, as horizontal deltoid compression could be sufficient for prosthetic stability [25]. On contrary, regardless implant design, **Clark et al.** [26] postulated that Ssc repair was not correlated to prosthetic stability, and reported similar dislocation rate between repair and non-repair groups. Nonetheless, a recent meta-analysis demonstrated a lower dislocation rate after Ssc repair whatever the implant-design [27], hence, Ssc tendon should be assessed preoperatively, with considering the RSA-design to be implanted.

Instability is accompanied with a considerable failure rate after revision [28]. **Chalmers et al.** [15] reported that 85% of primary RSA cases and >50% of revision RSA cases had successful outcomes after revision surgery. In this context, pre-operative planning, choice of implant-design, and intra-operative assessment of stability and impingement are advisable in all cases [29]. The accurate positioning of prosthetic components with proper tensioning of soft tissue envelope within acceptable measurement parameters is considered crucial for stability and longevity of implant [3].

II- Humeral Component Loosening

Loosening is defined with radiolucent lines adjacent to humeral stem. Mimicking the **Gruen et al.** classification for femoral stem loosening after total hip arthroplasty, **Gilot et al.** demonstrated similar lines resembling the former classification (Figure 2). Bone adjacent to humeral stem is divided into 8 zones. Zones 1, 2, and 3 representing the lateral aspect of the stem at the proximal, middle, and distal thirds respectively. Zone 4 is the area around the distal stem tip. Zones 5, 6, 7, and 8 represent the medial portion of the stem from the distal, middle, proximal thirds, and base, respectively. The lines are also classified as per their width as <1.0 mm, 1.0 to 1.50 mm, 1.51 to 2.0 mm or >2.01 mm. The humeral stem is radiographically at risk for clinical loosening if a radiolucent line ≥ 2 mm is present in ≥ 3 zones [30].

Humeral component loosening may occur at one of two sites: either within the cement mantle or unscrewing of the metaphyseal neck from the humeral stem. The latter can be managed by adding a built-in polyethylene bushing to the screw threads to enhance the interlock between the neck and stem [31].

III- Humeral fractures (Postoperative & Intraoperative)

A recent systematic review by **Shah et al.** revealed an incidence of 1.8 % of periprosthetic humeral fractures [6]. Osteopenia, rheumatoid arthritis, and revision surgeries are considered the major risk factor for periprosthetic humeral fractures [32,33]. Postoperative trauma often fractures the bone near the tip of prosthesis (stress-riser region). Intraoperative fractures usually follows operative technical issues, osteopenia, contracted soft tissues, and the use of press-fit stem (high-filling ratio) [31,34].

As illustrated in figure 3, periprosthetic humeral fractures can be classified according to **Wright and Cofield** [35] into type A (located at the tip of the prosthesis and extend proximally), type B (similar to A without proximal extension), and type C (distal to the prosthetic tip). Type A and C fractures can be managed conservatively, however, operative treatment should be considered for type B fractures [36]. Recently, **Kirchhoff et al.**

demonstrated an easy new classification (Table 1), targeted for fractures after RSA with the reliance upon fracture localisation, height, and prosthesis condition either stable or loose. Additionally, they considered a specific management for each type [37].

Humeral periprosthetic fractures are better avoided than managed. They should be avoided in every intraoperative step; inferior capsular release from the humerus, avoid excessive torque while positioning the arm in adduction and extension, the humeral canal is better reamed by hand, and broaching in line with the humeral shaft. Glenoid implantation should not be postponed after complete humeral preparation; as the spherical metaphyseal reamer usually leaves a thin humeral cortical shell, which is prone to fracture during glenoid exposure. Additionally, excessive fitting of the humeral stem is better avoided [28].

Prosthetic stability may be jeopardized with intraoperative metaphyseal, or tuberosity fractures; this can be managed by cerclage fixation or by utilization of long stem to avoid future stem loosening [19]. When present, intraoperative diaphyseal fractures must be stabilized before stem implantation by open reduction and internal fixation (ORIF) with a cable plating and cerclage wires. The use of a long stem prosthesis may be beneficial. Conservative management of intraoperative fractures usually delay rehabilitation; hence, it is not highly recommended [19]. Management of postoperative periprosthetic humeral fractures is still debatable. Non-operative management may be enough (Figure 4), however, there are concerns as per the non-union and longer healing time. On the contrary, surgical intervention represents a more aggressive but time-saving solution; represented in stem exchange with fracture bypass by at least twice the cortical diameter to tolerate torsional and bending loads [38]. Other options are ORIF with plating, or cortical strut allografts acting as bone plates secured with cables. Both options represent implant-sparing procedures [31].

Table 1: Kirchoff et al. classification for periprosthetic shoulder fractures after RSA as per fracture pattern, prosthetic stability with specific management for each type (ORIF; open reduction and internal fixation) [37].

Humeral fracture	Prosthesis stability	Management option
1; Tuberosities 2; Spiral 3; Oblique 4; Distal	S; Stable L; Loose	1-S; Conservative or ORIF 2-S; ORIF 3-S; ORIF L; Revision by long stem RSA, or long stem RSA + ORIF

Complications related to glenoid side

I- Scapular notching

An abutment-impingement was initially described by **Sirveaux et al.** [39] as a consequence of repeated contact between humeral stem and inferior scapular neck during abduction. They developed a radiographic-based classification system (Figure 5), based upon the defect size; grade 1 shows a defect within the inferior pillar of the scapular neck, grade 2 with defined bone defect under the level of the inferior screw within baseplate, grade 3 with defect extending over the inferior screw, and grade 4 with bone defect reaching the level of central peg. In the same context, later studies documented notching also with rotational friction (frictional-impingement) [40,41]. This repeated friction produces liner wear, and notching. The resultant released fragments out of friction induces inflammatory process and oste-

olysis [41]. It is fundamental to seek impingement-free-ROM in all planes. Rotational impingement can occur with humeral component placement posteriorly or anteriorly on the glenoid, whilst, superior glenoid placement can lead to abutment-impingement [42].

Scapular notching is usually observed radiographically six months postoperatively (28). Its incidence relies upon different factors; glenosphere offset and position, COR, humeral component position, and prosthetic design. Possible procedures to limit notching incidence, were proposed including COR lateralization, humeral lateralization via either reducing neck-shaft angle or choosing lateralized-offset prosthesis, inferior positioning of baseplate, glenosphere inferior tilting, and utilization of a larger-diameter glenosphere. Out of the mentioned procedures, humeral neck-shaft angle and glenosphere placement are considered the most **beneficial to decrease notching without risks of glenoid loosening and reducing prosthetic longevity** [43,44]. **Ferrier et al.** [45] noted the lowest notching incidence and the best clinical results after humeral lowering by >24 mm.

Clinical consequences of scapular notching are still controversial. Prosthetic instability, unexplained pain, and loosening might be related. **Boileau et al.** and **Lévine et al.** reported that neither the presence nor the size of notching impacted clinical scores [46,47], on the contrary, **Sirveaux et al.** and **Simovitch et al.** demonstrated declined clinical outcome with notching [39,42]. There is no consensus on erosion progression, **Werner et al.** concluded that radiographic progress seemed to reach a plateau, others reported erosion worsening with time [48-50].

II- Glenoid loosening & failure

The highly constrained nature of early reverse shoulder prosthesis showed extremely high glenoid loosening and failure rates following the resultant high shear and torque on glenoid component. Glenoid loosening was demonstrated radiographically as radiolucent zones around glenoid component, usually within one year postoperatively [51,52]. With modern implants, the rate of loosening declined especially with inferior tilting of implanted baseplate [53].

Bone ingrowth onto implanted baseplate through neutralizing the forces across baseplate-bone interface, is the guarantee against glenoid side failure, which depends upon the surgical technique and implant design. Micromotion across baseplate-bone interface can be minimized through inferior tilting of baseplate, the use of locking screws with increased angle between them and the central peg [17,54]. **Management of failed glenoid component** is always challenging. Treatment options may be staged-defect grafting or one revision procedure with/without structural allograft [55].

III- Intraoperative glenoid Fracture

As declared by many authors, intraoperative glenoid fractures occur due to either reaming of osteoporotic glenoid beyond subchondral bone, or reaming prior to glenoid one contact [56]. This rare complication (Figure 6) represents 0.3% of complications [6]. Management depends upon the implant design. On the setting of baseplate with central post, the fractured fragment should be stabilized prior to baseplate implantation. On the contrary, unstable non-reconstructed glenoid bed for baseplate, necessitates hemiarthroplasty without baseplate implantation either as a last resort, or as temporary solution for later conversion to RSA [19].

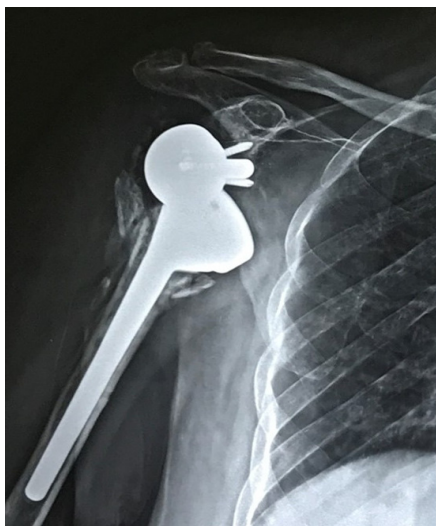


Figure 1: Anterior dislocation of RSA one month postoperatively (patient's identity is not disclosed).

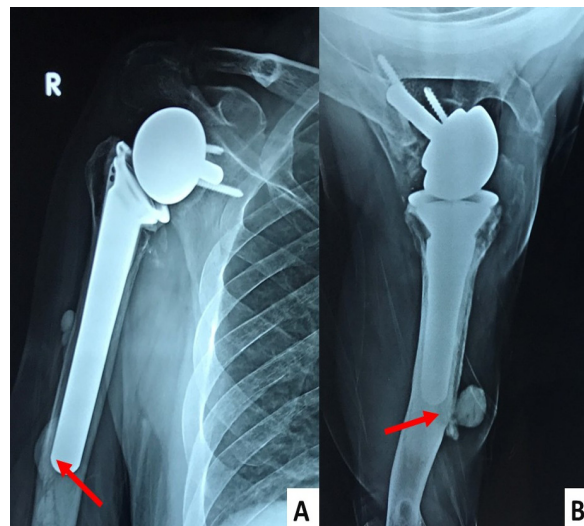


Figure 4: Healed periprosthetic humeral fracture around the tip of stem with extravasation of cement (patient's identity is not disclosed).

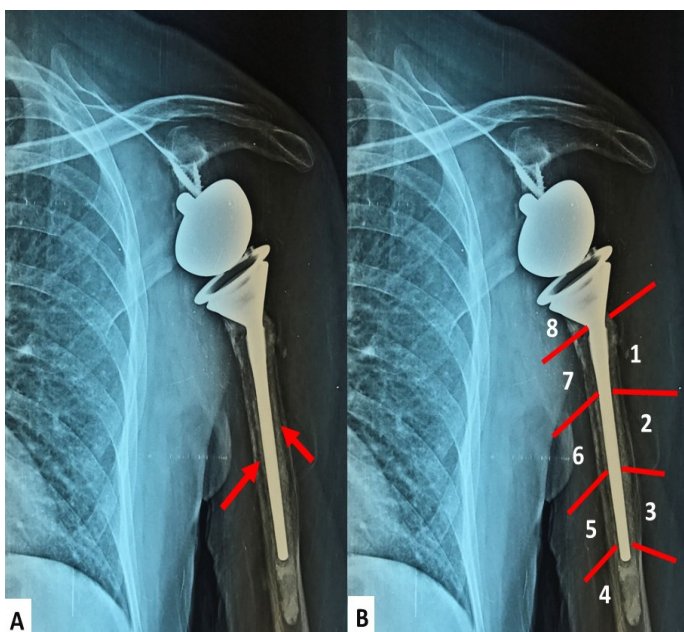


Figure 2: (A) Cemented humeral stem with significant lucent lines (red arrows), (B) The eight zones of humeral stem loosening as defined by Gilot et al.

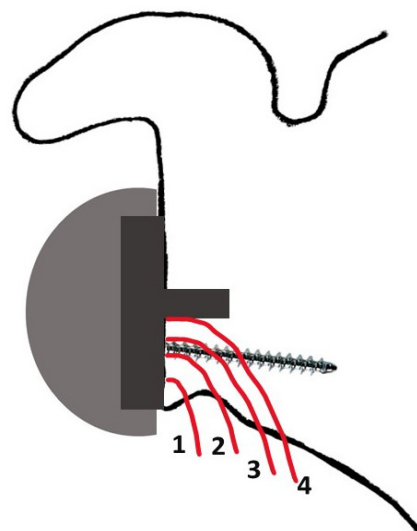


Figure 5: Illustration demonstrating the scapular notching classification.

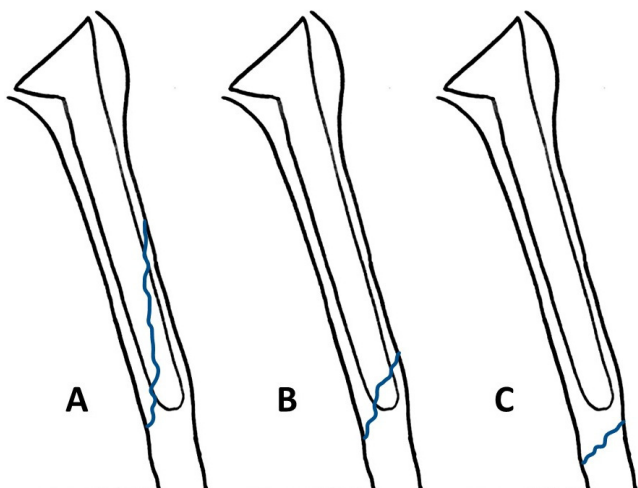


Figure 3: Wright and Cofield classification of periprosthetic humeral fractures.

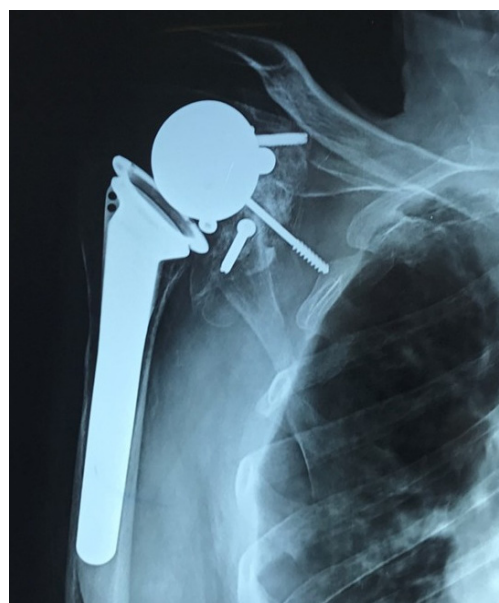


Figure 6: Baseplate malpositioning and failure following improper fixation due to intraoperative glenoid fracture (patient's identity is not disclosed).

IV Acromial & scapular fractures

Acromial or scapular fractures are considered a fatigue fracture represented around 3 to 6 months postoperatively, due to deltoid over tensioning following excessive medialization or distalization of COR. Arm lengthening >2.5 mm is considered excessive lengthening [3,57,58]. **These fractures are usually correlated to osteoporosis and are relatively rare with incidence rates ranging from 0.9% to 10% [12,20,59].** Sometimes, fractures are silent without functional deficit. **Crosby and Hamilton** classified acromial fractures into type I; anterior acromion fracture, type II; posterior acromial body fracture posterior to acromioclavicular joint, type III; scapular spine fracture extending from tip of peripheral screw [59].

It is still recommended to limit COR distalization <2.5cm to limit acromion fracture [3,60]. Intraoperatively, the baseplate is better not placed excessively inferior, besides, a lateralized-design prosthesis can decrease incidence of scapular fractures. In addition, directing the superior screw within the baseplate toward the coracoid base could prevent scapular spine fractures [12]. Early detection might be predicted by progressive inclined acromial slope in follow-up radiographs [61]. A high suspicion of acromial fracture could be linked to patients in pain, with slowly progressing rehabilitation, and with sudden worsening shoulder function in the first year postoperative. Management of fractured scapula and acromion is still debated [19]. With conservative management, **Levy et al.** [62] demonstrated decreased shoulder function, while **Hattrup** [63] reported good results. **Crosby et al.** [59] documented high nonunion rate, and recommended surgical fixation with tension band wiring and buttress plate.

V- Glenoid Dissociation

The glenosphere is fixed to the baseplate as per the implant design via one of two methods, either a morse taper or central locking screw [26]. Dissociation of glenosphere out of the baseplate has been reported with many RSA-designs. Morse taper failure usually follows soft tissue interposition, bony impingement, single-pole engagement of glenosphere after its impaction under slight angle, fluid in the well of the female aspect of the assembly, **insufficient force applied to impact the glenosphere**, and incomplete-seated glenosphere due to proud or cross-threaded screws within the baseplate [64]. Incomplete glenosphere-seating, even by <1 mm, decreases the cold-weld between the glenosphere and the baseplate [64].

Considering the geometry of the utilized implant is fundamental for prevention of such complication. Appropriate glenosphere seating over the baseplate is best obtained via the utilization of the rim reamer. The outer side diameter of the rim reamer is better larger than that of glenosphere. Without, the reamer would be less effective in removing the potentially blocking interfering bone [64]. Vigorous glenosphere pull after impaction remains the principal method to verify complete glenosphere seating. Moreover, the glenosphere should be flush with baseplate when inspected on post-operative radiograph [26]. Patients must be cautious to avoid early impact loading postoperatively.

Neurovascular complications

I- Neurologic injury

Postoperative neurologic injury is often transient. It accounts for 1%–4% after RSA [65]. Out of which, brachial plexopathy and

axillary nerve injuries are the most common [66]. Axillary nerve is often affected following stretch injury by retractors or prolonged arm positioning in ER and extension. Rarely, direct injury is caused by the saw or scalpel [66,67]. It may also be at risk at the junction of humeral head with the shaft in posterior metaphyseal area. Thus, care should be taken when reaming the metaphysis to avoid posterior humeral cortical violation, particularly when having a low humeral cut and using a large reamer [68].

Stretch injuries are generally reversible during the first 3 months after surgery, but some do not heal for long periods, resulting in neurologic deficits [12]. Permanent axillary nerve injury leads to arm weakness and shoulder instability [67]. Some authors recommend routine exposure or palpation of the nerve performed with advantage of the **tug test [69,70].** The **suprascapular nerve** is at risk during glenoid implantation; the screws within the baseplate may perforate the glenoid and injure the nerve leading to infraspinatus muscle deficiency [71]. In revision surgeries, neurologic injury may be associated with removal of a well fixed cemented humeral stem, surgical dissection in altered anatomy, and presence of scar tissue [72].

II- Hematoma

A large dead space may occur after RSA, particularly with severely deficient RC, with an inclined risk for hematoma formation in 1%-20%. The possible causes for developing hematoma might be inferior glenosphere placement, glenosphere medialization, or valgus orientation of humeral component [52]. To guard against hematoma formation, surgeons can perform meticulous hemostasis intraoperatively with electrocautery, layered wound closure, and drain is better used with mentioned risk factors. Hematoma is linked to possible periprosthetic infection. persistent discharge from incision may alarm for early sinus tract formation, hence, hematoma evacuation, irrigation, and debridement might be indicated [73].

III- Infection

Periprosthetic infection demonstrates 1%-10%, being one of two most common complications of RSA [5]. Early prosthetic failure within the first two years postoperatively is a strong indicator of infection [74], also, it remains the most common reason for revision within 2 years after RSA [75]. Infection is always linked to rheumatoid arthritis, revision surgeries, and formed hematoma with large dead space [76]. Other risk factors should be considered including morbid obesity, uncontrolled diabetes, malnutrition, young age <65 years, intravenous drug abuse, long operation time, and number of times the surgical room door was opened during surgery [11,28,77,78].

Shoulder surgeon should suspect possible prosthetic infection in cases with painful stiff reconstructed joint, regardless the normal serological markers and normal radiographs [79]. **Pottinger et al. [80] reinforced the importance of Propionibacterium acnes (P. acnes),** linked to nearly 52% of acute or chronic infections, additionally, aspiration rarely indicates a causative organism.

Avoiding prosthetic infection is mandatory. That might be achieved via bathing with chlorhexidine gluconate on the night before surgery [81,82], prophylactic administration of first-generation cephalosporin one hour before surgery, however, P. acnes will remain not covered [83]. During skin preparation and before draping, drying of painted chlorhexidine should be achieved [84]. Recently, benzoyl peroxide has been reported to eradicate P. acne. Limiting the number of times, the surgical room doors opening during surgery is recommended [28].

Regular changing surgical gloves, changing the blade after skin incision, frequent surgical site irrigation, irrigation with diluted povidone (1.3 g/L), injection of gentamicin at the time of closure, use of antibiotic-loaded cement (1 g of vancomycin/bone cement), and use of topical adhesives for skin closure have been reported to be effective [74,75,77,85,86].

In cases with confirmed postoperative infection, empirical antibiotics are started till causative organism is identified on culture and sensitivity for tailoring curative antibiotic therapy, some bacterial species can be evident in 3-4 days, however, slowly growing ones as *Cutibacterium acnes* (formerly *P. acnes*) may require 10-14 days for identification [87,88]. With acute onset infection (within 6 weeks of arthroplasty), irrigation, debridement, and polyethylene exchange can be sufficient. Nonetheless, chronic infection usually indicates two-stage revision. The first stage includes hardware removal, irrigation, debridement, and antibiotic spacer. Then, at least six weeks of parenteral antibiotics, lastly, prosthetic reimplant after confirmed negative cultures and blood tests [76]. Treatment of chronic infection with one-stage exchange can reduce recovery time and costs, however, it is still with a little evidence [76,89]. **Klatte et al.** [90] reported a 94% success rate with a mean follow-up period of 4.7 years. In a systematic review, both one- and two-stage revision demonstrated 85% success rates [91]. Additionally, cement spacers could be a long-term treatment option for low demand patients [91,92].

Summary

Despite the endured experience and better understanding of the fundamental ideas of RSA, complications nevertheless occur, even with the most experienced surgeons. Distinctive issues should be considered including patient selection, pre-operative planning, familiarity with various RSA designs, and surgical technique as per the accurate positioning and soft tissue balancing. Taking into consideration the risk factors of each complication, the operating surgeon can avoid and treat them.

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