

Shoulder Pain and Rotator Cuff Tendinosis



Centre for Chiropractic & Sports Rehabilitation

An integrative, biomechanical approach to the everyday sports and spinal injuries.

We treat many types of shoulder pain at CCSR. Shoulder pain is usually caused by vigorous repetitive arm use (such as swimming or golfing), overhead lifting, or any activities that hold your arms above your head. Through motions like these, the shoulder muscles tighten, and will eventually load onto their attached tendons. The tendons then become inflamed, which contracts the shoulder muscles further into the shoulder joint and thereby causes further tightness. So, when a person raises an arm, his or her shoulder can impinge (pinch) the shoulder bursa or the tendon. This can lead to either bursitis (inflammation of the bursa) or tendinitis (inflammation of the tendon). If left untreated, tendinitis (which is temporary) will progress into tendinosis: painful degeneration of the tendons in the shoulder.

Rotator cuff tendinosis usually presents with a deep ache radiating from the outer arm to several centimetres below the top of the shoulder. This pain may interfere with sleep, and often awakens people from sleep with a nagging pain in their upper arm. Raising arms overhead or reaching behind the body tends to aggravate the symptoms. Usually, patients will experience significant pain *after* completing a repetitive motion activity but will not normally be affected while completing it. For example, a patient may feel a bit of pain while warming up for a game of squash, but this will improve as the muscles warm up and the patient may be pain-free during his or her game. After the game, however, the patient will likely experience lots of pain and decreased function of the shoulder.

The rotator cuff is a group of four muscles and tendons that control arm rotation and elevation. It works with the deltoid muscle to provide strength, stability, and motion to the shoulder for all activities that involve the shoulder: full-arm movement, lifting, throwing, pushing, pulling, swinging, etc. Most sports include some level of shoulder movement, as well as day-to-day activities: food preparation, cleaning, driving, etc. Unfortunately, most of these activities include repetitive movements, and repetitive strain is at the root of all rotator cuff injuries. The rotator cuff is sandwiched between two bones, which means that repetitive motion of these bones can inflame the tendons and muscles in the rotator cuff, eventually wearing away at the collagen in this area. Because all shoulder injuries are the result of inflammation, treatment always aims to reduce inflammation and regrow collagen.

Treatment at CCSR

Treatment at CCSR will aim to reduce inflammation in the affected shoulder, encourage healthy collagen to regrow, and to improve the range of motion/strength of the shoulder so it can deal with daily tasks. Treatment will include stretching, soft-tissue therapy, massage, active release, low-level laser therapy, friction massage, and the graston technique. These research-based methods are proven to improve your symptoms and encourage growth of healthy collagen.

Home Treatment

There are several things you can do to improve your rotator cuff symptoms. Most patients find that an anti-inflammatory medication helps ease their pain, but keep in mind that ibuprofen and its relatives will only offer temporary relief. To heal the injury, you *must* ice your shoulder and stop repetitive motion activities of your shoulder! Ice will reduce inflammation, and rest will allow new collagen to grow uninterrupted. Continually straining the affected area will impede collagen growth, and a patient will rarely see improvement. We highly encourage patients to take this rest seriously: don't carry heavy objects with the affected arm, and avoid shoulder straps (backpacks, purses, bags) on that shoulder.

Through the course of treatment, your practitioner will provide you with home-treatment activities that will improve flexibility, strength, and range of motion in the shoulder and rotator cuff. These activities are designed to strengthen the rotator cuff so that it can deal with repetitive tasks without further injury.

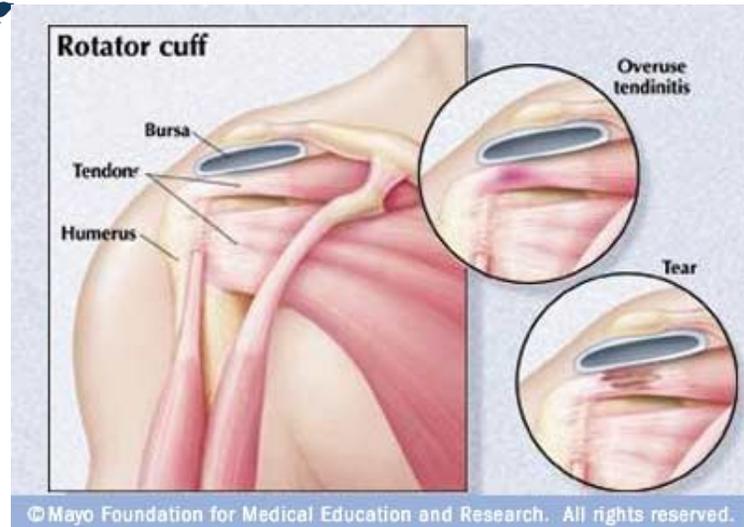


Figure 1: Areas affected with shoulder pain" the muscles, the tendons, and the bursa