

ROTATER CUFF INJURIES

Question: I recently started having shoulder pain for no apparent reason. My doctor told me that I have rotator cuff tendonitis. How did I get that and what can I do about it?

Answer: Most shoulder problems involve the rotator cuff muscles and tendons. The rotator cuff is a group of four muscles and their tendons that holds your shoulder joint in the proper place.

As you age, your rotator cuff muscles become weaker unless you specifically exercise these. Normal activity does not accomplish this.

You use your shoulder numerous times in a day to reach, lift or perform a task overhead. This all can lead to rotator cuff tendonitis, which can be very painful. When your shoulder joint is not in the proper place, the tendon and bursa can become pinched, known as impingement. This can also cause fraying of the tendon, resulting in tearing.

As you age, the blood supply is lessened in a portion of the rotator cuff called the "critical zone". This is more likely to tear, resulting in shoulder pain with movement or even at rest. You may not be able to move your shoulder forward when very inflamed.

Your chiropractor or doctor can check your range of motion and take x-rays to look for arthritis. X-rays are limited for shoulder problems as many conditions are due to the muscles and tendons. A shoulder MRI is the best test to evaluate these tissues.

If you have a completely torn rotator cuff tendon, you need to see an orthopedic surgeon. If you have a partial tear or inflamed tendon, these can be treated without surgery.

The first goal is to reduce inflammation in the shoulder. In our office, we use pulsed ultrasound therapy and electrical muscle stimulation.

Additionally, we prescribe home use of ice on an aggressive basis. We have you ice your shoulder 6 or more times per day for 20 minute intervals. The faster you get rid of inflammation, the faster you will get relief and be on your way to healing.

Medical doctors prescribe anti-inflammatory medication, as well as occasional cortisone injections to reduce inflammation.

Once your inflammation has reduced, you have to work on your range of motion. If your shoulder is limited in movement, this must be corrected. This is done through home exercises, as well as part of your therapy in our office.

We use cross-friction massage to help loosen tight tendons and ligaments. This breaks excess scar tissue and adhesions to allow pain-free motion.

Lastly, you must strengthen the rotator cuff muscles or you can expect this condition to return. I have many patients that do quite well on a long-term basis as long as they do their exercises. If not, the condition can return.

It is important not to ignore ongoing shoulder pain. If the shoulder remains inflamed, it can become frozen, which is called adhesive capsulitis. Once this happens, it can take months to get your shoulder moving again. It is also a painful process to recover.

Keeping your shoulders healthy is essential in keeping you healthy and moving. Don't delay.

See your chiropractor for shoulder pain that won't go away.

Copyright © 2008 - Konicki Schumacher Chiropractic. All rights reserved.

Dr. Tom Konicki is a board certified chiropractic orthopedist and has practiced for 17 years in South Dayton. You can reach him at www.kschiro.com or mail your questions to Ask the Chiropractor, 2165 Miamisburg-Centerville Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459.