

Shoulder Pain Could Be Your Rotator Cuff

Shoulder pain or loss of shoulder function could mean problems with your rotator cuff.

The rotator cuff is basically a small set of muscles which allow you to raise your arm over your head or away from your body. Unfortunately, since the rotator cuff is so small, it can be quite susceptible to injury.

How does injury occur?

Rotator cuff injuries can be caused by trauma or from repetitive use. The traumatic injury can be associated with a "pop" or a tearing sensation and is generally associated with a sudden decrease in your ability to raise your arm.

Repetitive injuries appear slowly over time. Frequently, patients experience "tendonitis" or "bursitis" for months or years before actually tearing their rotator cuff. In these cases which we sometimes call impingement, the tendonitis has a way of not working itself out. In fact, part of the reason that rotator cuff injuries are so common is that they don't work themselves out but just wear thinner and thinner until they tear completely.

Most people seek help when their pain or decreased function interferes with routine activities such as sleeping.

What are the available treatments?

For most mild to moderate rotator cuff injuries, multiple non-surgical treatments are available. These include anti-inflammatories, physical therapy, activity modification and cortisone injections.

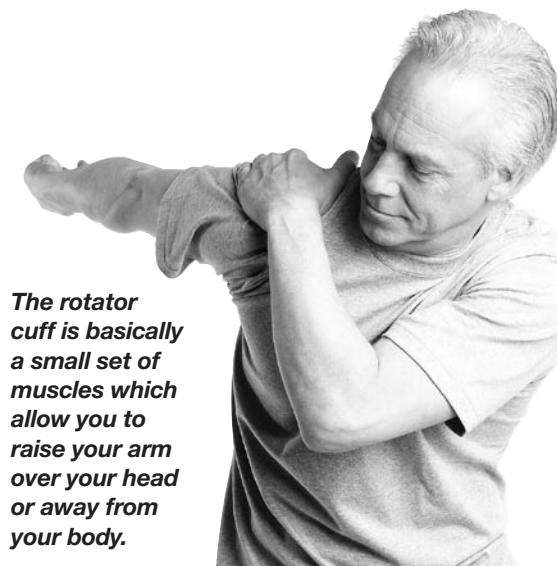
Cortisone injections remain the best non-surgical tool

at our disposal, quickly diminishing tendonitis and bursitis in the shoulder, lessening the risk that the tendonitis will progress to a rotator cuff tear.

Physical therapy can improve the strength and flexibility of the shoulder, diminish symptoms and help prevent recurrence.

What are the initial tests?

X-rays are a necessary part of your orthopaedic surgeon's



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initial evaluation. Although x-rays generally will not show a rotator cuff tear, they do help rule out other problems that may be the source of shoulder pain.

An MRI can also confirm the diagnosis and determine the size of the tear.

When is surgery needed?

Not all rotator cuff tears need to be treated surgically, but surgery may be necessary when the non-surgical treatments do not help to decrease the pain and/or improve the function of the shoulder. Newer arthroscopic techniques have been helpful in diminishing the amount of post-operative pain.

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