

Good Health House Call

This week we speak with Dr. Ferguson about Rotator Cuff Tears (RCT)

Q My doctor suspects I've torn my "rotator cuff". What exactly is a rotator cuff tear?

A The rotator cuff is a group of four muscles and their tendons that attach to the upper arm bone (humerus). It functions to stabilize the shoulder joint and to allow overhead movement and rotation of the shoulder.

Rotator cuff tears (RCT) can occur after a single traumatic injury or can occur over time through overuse. RCT are more common in people over 40 and those whose occupations involve repetitive overhead motions.

Symptoms of RCT include pain when raising the arm, weakness when lifting the arm, pain when lying on the affected side at night, and pain radiating to the side of the arm.

RCT are diagnosed by physicians through listening to the patient's history of the injury, performing a physical examination, x-rays, and sometimes MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). In many cases, treatment through rest, activity modification, anti-inflammatory medications, steroid injections and physical therapy can improve the pain and function of the involved shoulder.

If nonsurgical treatment fails or the tear is particularly large, surgery may be required. Most surgical repairs can be performed on an outpatient basis. The type of repair performed depends on the size, shape and location of the tear. Many tears can be repaired arthroscopically with a small camera and instruments inserted through tiny incisions and the surgeon watching a video monitor.



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Dr. Christopher Ferguson earned a medical degree from University of Mississippi School of Medicine, Jackson, MS. He completed his residency in orthopaedic surgery at University of Mississippi School of Medicine. He completed an AO Fellowship (Trauma) in Chur, Switzerland.

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