

Tips for preventing and dealing with shoulder injuries

By Kyle Swanson

Shoulder pain is estimated to affect nearly 20 percent of people at some point in their lives. Causes of shoulder pain can range from trauma to overuse injuries or a combination of both.

Contact sports such as football or hockey can lead to traumatic injuries. Golf, racket sports, swimming and throwing sports can lead to overuse injuries. The type of injury usually determines the type of symptoms people have.



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The shoulder is complex is the most unstable joint in the body. It's made up of a "sloppy" ball-and-socket joint, which allows for a wide range of motion. One of the most important structures for shoulder function is the rotator cuff complex. For the shoulder to work properly, it relies on the coordinated function between the muscles, ligaments and bony structures. An injury to any one of these can cause pain and a loss of function.

Shoulder injury signs and symptoms include:

- Loss of motion

- Weakness
- Pain with overhead activities/lifting
- Night pain
- Popping/clicking
- Feeling of instability

Common shoulder injuries

Rotator cuff tears. The rotator cuff is a group of four muscles and tendons that surround the shoulder and help with motion and stability. Tears to the rotator cuff are more common in aging athletes and can be a result of trauma, or overuse. Many people endure rotator cuff pain, especially at night.

Bursitis. The bursa is a thin, fluid-filled sack that allows for smooth motion between the tendon and bone. It can become inflamed and interfere with normal shoulder movement. This is usually the result of overuse – commonly seen in overhead sports, such as volleyball or baseball. The pain may arise when reaching for something overhead and at the end of the day.

Arthritis. Cartilage, the smooth covering on the end of bones, can become damaged from an injury or normal use. Cartilage has a poor capacity to heal and degenerates over time, which leads to arthritis. When there is significant loss of cartilage, the normal movement of the shoulder joint is lost. Shoulder arthritis typically causes loss of motion, morning stiffness and significant pain.

Your treatment options

Most shoulder injuries can be treated with rest, activity modification, ice and anti-inflammatories. If the pain does not improve after seven to 10 days, it's important to see a

physician who specializes in shoulder injuries.

Depending on the severity of the injury, X-rays or an MRI may be required. Upon diagnosis, physical therapy may be prescribed and/or a cortisone injection may be offered to decrease the inflammation. Surgery may be necessary if there is a tear. Today, with modern technology, most of the injuries requiring surgery can be treated arthroscopically, minimizing trauma and recovery time.

Injury prevention

Warming up before any activity requiring repetitive motion of the shoulder is crucial. Preseason conditioning and strengthening the rotator cuff and core muscles can help prevent injuries later in the season. Proper mechanics can take stress off the shoulder, decreasing the chance of injury. The key is to be consistent with your program.

Education and assessment are key factors in the treatment of shoulder pain. On Sept. 12, from 6-7pm at Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village I will present the latest techniques and procedures in treating shoulder arthritis. This free wellness lecture will provide an in-depth look into the anatomy of the shoulder, signs and symptoms and treatment options.

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