

## Rotator Cuff Disorders

The rotator cuff is a group of 4 muscles that provide stability and mobility to the shoulder joint.

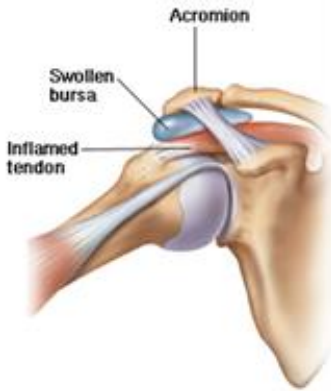
The rotator cuff is susceptible to: tendinopathy (tendinosis/tendinitis), bursitis, impingement and tears.

Common complaints of rotator cuff disorders include: pain worsened with overhead activities, strength limitations and loss of function. Patients often have range of motion loss and cannot lie on the affected side.

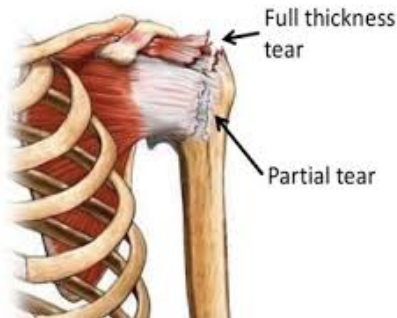
Injuries are very common in this region because the shoulder is a dynamic joint, offering more mobility than any other joint in the body. Many things are required in order for a shoulder joint to function under normal conditions. These include: healthy, intact, conditioned muscles, normal joint mechanics, good neck and shoulder posture and tendons/bursa that are free of excess inflammation.

### TREATMENT:

The majority of rotator cuff injuries benefit from non-operative management for a period of at least 3 months, before surgical consideration. Treatment includes rest, ice/heat, and Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatories. Physical Therapy can also offer manual therapy, including frictions to the tendon, soft tissue techniques for muscle health, joint mobilization, therapeutic UltraSound and Electrical Stimulation for pain and inflammation reduction, and exercises to optimize muscle function. Stretching and strengthening should be introduced at the appropriate time of healing to ensure treatment success.



**Impingement Syndromes:** A very common shoulder presentation where pain is present when the patient tries to lift their arm above 90 degrees. Often there is a painful arc in the movement where at the beginning of movement there is no pain, but as the inflamed tendon travels under the swollen bursa sac and arch formed by the acromion (pictured to the left) it gets pinched off leading to pain. This condition responds very well to a physical therapy program designed to reduce inflammation to the affected structures and then restore normal mechanical movement to the shoulder joint. Once typical joint mechanics are restored (pain free full range of motion), appropriate strength exercises are commence to help prevent the condition from returning.



**Rotator Cuff Tear:** This is a very common condition present in individuals with shoulder pain. The rotator cuff is made up of 4 muscles, depending on which muscle is damaged, there can be several types of presentations. The presentation also depends on the severity of damage which can range from a partial thickness tear to a full thickness tear.

Partial thickness tears are significantly more common and do often lead to significantly more symptoms. These do respond to conservative therapy but can take months to recover. Full thickness tears may be repaired surgically. Factors to determine a candidates appropriateness for surgery depend on their age, impairments, and their future activity and work expectations. Surgically repaired rotator cuffs typically require 3-4 months of rehabilitation post-operatively.

Typically with young individuals there is a traumatic event leading to rotator cuff damage and in individuals over 40, tears are often a result of overuse and degeneration.

**Information taken from Orthopedic Physical Assessment Sixth Edition written by David J. Magee**