



Rotator cuff tendonitis/ bursitis/impingement syndrome

Shoulder pain often involves inflammation of more than one structure surrounding your shoulder joint. Sometimes one or more tendons are inflamed, and sometimes you may also have inflammation of the bursa - a fluid filled sack which reduces friction between bone and tendons.

Unless you remember a distinct event or trauma to your shoulder, inflammation is usually the result of repetitive stresses to the structures mentioned. Activities and postures in your everyday life may be to blame, but sometimes inflammation develops due to some unusual activity that you have been performing. Typical activities include overhead activities and sleep postures, or simply overdoing one singular shoulder activity. Usually your own physique plays a role. Being tight in certain muscle groups and perhaps weak in others can lead to injury. Even poor posture habits at work and with leisure add to the problem.

Shoulder pain is usually addressed through one or more of the following: Rest, ice/commercial cold packs, avoidance of the offending activities, medications, injections, and physical therapy. Surgery is typically understood to be a last resort, or may be considered if there is actually a tear in one or more tendons. As you participate in physical therapy, there are some guidelines which may assist you in the process of recovery. We have put together this helpful handout so that you have access to these guidelines at home, in case you need a little reminding!

Do's:

- Please consult your physical therapist for suggested exercises you can begin to do on your own. Typically, strengthening exercises are done 1-2 times daily whereas stretches (to gain range of motion) are done throughout the day.
- Be gentle with exercises - avoid more than mild discomfort.
- Try to sleep on your back with a pillow between your abdomen and your forearm (the elbow will be bent). You may also need a small support under your elbow to raise your elbow at or above shoulder level. Try also sleeping on your opposite side with a pillow between your ribs and your upper arm.
- Use ice, commercial cold packs, or a bag of frozen peas on your shoulder throughout the day if you have nearly constant pain, and perhaps 2-3 times per day if having intermittent symptoms. Apply the cold for about 15-20 minutes

Don'ts

- Avoid repeated or prolonged overhead reaching and lifting.
- Avoid propping arm up such as when placing elbow on the car window edge when driving.
- Avoid sleeping with your arm overhead if lying on your back or stomach.
- Avoid carrying, lifting, pushing, or pulling with the painful arm until pain free.