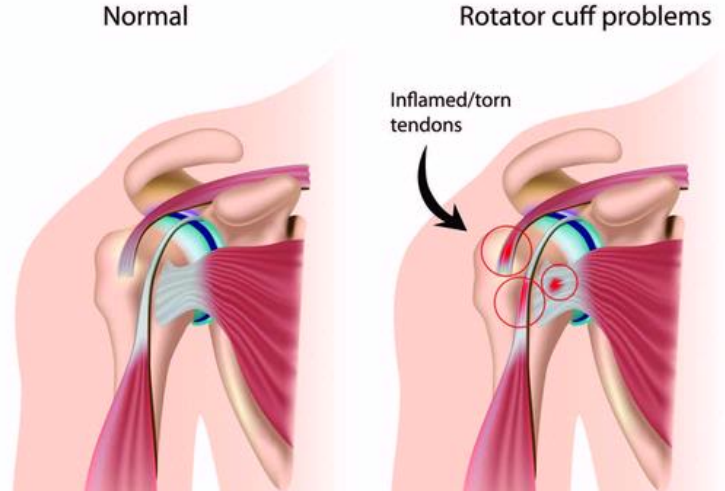


The Complexities of the Rotator Cuff

Simple strengthening exercises can be done at home

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Every year thousands of Americans are stricken with shoulder pain due to an injury involving the rotator cuff. Whether you are an athlete, weekend warrior or even if you enjoy a more sedentary lifestyle, you might be one of those afflicted with rotator cuff pain.

The shoulder complex is considered a ball-and-socket joint that allows the shoulder to move in all directions. (Compare this to a knee, for example, which is only a hinge joint.) The rotator cuff (often incorrectly referred to as a "rotor cup" or "rotary cuff") is comprised of four muscles and the tendons needed to stabilize the shoulder during these movements.

A few reasons injuries can occur to the rotator cuff are trauma, overuse and structural changes that occur with age and predispose the shoulder to injury. To help prevent rotator cuff injuries, it is important to avoid overhead, repetitive activities such as lifting heavy items at work, exercising at the gym (shoulder press or posture (rounded shoulders) can also be problematic over time, causing unwanted pressure on the rotator cuff which may cause micro tearing.

The rotator cuff is no different than other muscles in the body and needs to be strengthened to stay in shape, whether it is preemptive, or post injury or surgery. Isolated exercises keep the muscles and tendons strong, stabilize the shoulder and limit the risk of injury. Exercises can also help improve posture by balancing muscles, thus avoiding rounded shoulders.

According to Patrick St. Pierre, MD, Director of Sports Medicine at Eisenhower Desert Orthopedic Center, "Most rotator cuff injuries are partial tears, or what is called tendinosis. Injury to the tendon and the associated bursitis is what causes the pain. Pain control and proper rehabilitation is very successful in treating these injuries and in most cases, surgery can be avoided." Talk with your physician or physical therapist to determine the specific exercises that would be right for you. Based on your age, activities, history and any current symptoms, a program can be tailored to match your needs.

Rotator cuff strengthening exercises may be done at home. Common household items can be used such as a soup can or water bottle and a Thera-Band® can be purchased on the Internet. For more information about specific exercises, work with your physician and physical therapist to determine the most optimal exercise regimen. Perform 10 repetitions of each exercise at a frequency of three times per week. It is important to let your muscles recover. A day of rest between exercise sessions is recommended.

We brush our teeth at least twice a day to keep them healthy and reduce the risk of disease. Exercising your shoulder has the same proven effect — so get moving!