

Rotator Cuff Tear

What are the Rotator Cuff Muscles?

Rotator cuff muscles consist of 4 muscles deep in the shoulder. The rotator cuff stabilizes your shoulder as you move your arm. An injury to these muscles can cause shoulder pain and weakness.

Causes

Pain and weakness are caused by damage to the rotator cuff muscles. Repetitive overhead movements, a sudden injury (like a fall), and age are causes of rotator cuff damage. As we age, the rotator cuff muscles are more prone to injury.

Symptoms

You may feel pain in the front and/or side of your shoulder and upper arm. The pain can sometimes go as far down as the elbow. The pain usually occurs as you raise your arm, lift things overhead and sleeping.

Imaging Tests

1. X-Rays: While the muscles don't show up on X-rays; however, they can show other findings that suggest a rotator cuff tear.
2. MRI: A MRI shows the rotator cuff muscles and can confirm a tear of these muscles.
3. Ultrasound: Can be performed in the office and used to confirm a rotator cuff tear.

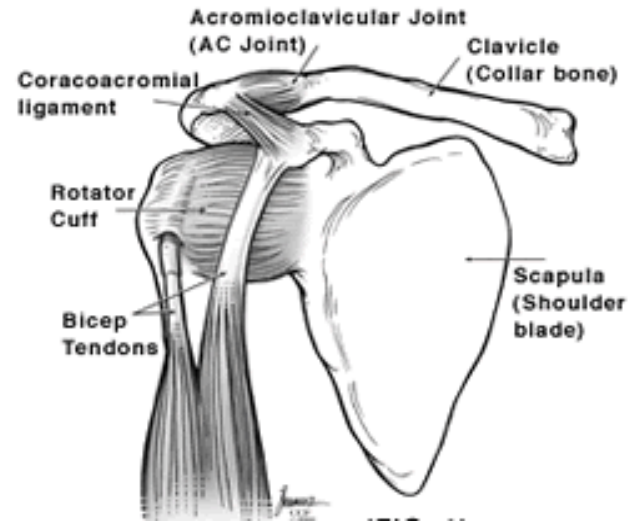
Treatment – Initial Treatment

1. Keep Your **Shoulder Motion**: shoulder motion follows the motto – if you don't use it you lose it. Remember to stretch your shoulder. While lying on your back, raise your arm overhead and let gravity pull your arm overhead. Also, sliding a soapy hand up the shower wall is another good stretch to keep your motion.

2. Over the counter oral **Anti-Inflammatory medication** (Ibuprofen, Aleve, Motrin, Advil) helps improve inflammation in your shoulder and decrease your pain.

3. Applying **Heat** to your shoulder during the day and **Ice** at night can help with pain.

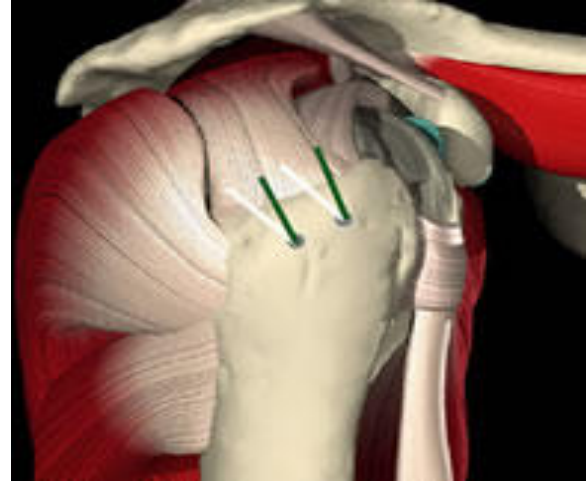
4. **Physical Therapy**: While rotator cuff tears do not heal on their own, physical therapy allows you to strengthen your remaining intact rotator cuff muscles and restore your shoulder's function. Remember most of the time you only tear 1 of the 4 rotator cuff muscles, so you are trying to strengthen the other 3 muscles. A physical therapist can direct you on several exercises to strengthen your shoulder. You should do these exercises on your own at home every day.



5. A **Cortisone injection** to the shoulder can help relieve some of your shoulder pain. Remember it is important to also stretch and perform your shoulder exercises (as above) after a cortisone injection.

Surgery

If your pain does not improve with the above treatments, surgery might be an option. Rotator cuff surgery is an outpatient procedure. In addition to general anesthesia, the anesthesiologist will place a shoulder block to numb your arm before surgery. The shoulder block helps with pain after surgery. The surgery is done arthroscopically (several small poke holes using a camera). Sutures are used to repair the torn muscle back down to your bone so your body can heal the muscle attachment. You will come out of surgery with a sling on your arm. After you recover in the recovery room, you will be allowed to go home.



After Surgery Physical Therapy

Post-surgery rehab after rotator cuff surgery is 3 times more important than the actual surgery! If you are not diligent with your therapy and exercises after surgery you will not be happy with your results.

General Recovery after rotator cuff surgery is:

1. A sling is worn for 4 to 6 weeks. Once directed to come out of your sling, you can use your arm by your side (not overhead)
2. Physical Therapy usually starts 3-5 days after surgery.
3. 12 weeks after surgery you will be allowed to raise your arm overhead without any assistance. **Again, it is 3 months before I let you raise your arm over your head by yourself (it takes this long for the rotator cuff to heal).**
4. A **minimum of 16 weeks (4 months) of physical therapy is needed after surgery.** Afterwards you continue your exercises at home.
5. Your shoulder will continue to strengthen up to a year after surgery.