

Condition of the Week

By Randal Burkholder, DC

Healthy Shoulders

Your shoulder is one of the most important and complex joints in your body. In fact your shoulder isn't just a single joint. It is actually a complex of two joints, about a dozen muscles, tendons, ligaments, and connective tissue through which all of the nerves and blood vessels for your arm and hand must travel. The main shoulder joint is a ball and socket type joint, much like your hip, except that the socket holding your shoulder together does not completely surround the joint. Instead, much of the joint is held together by tendons, ligaments and connective tissue. This structural trade-off allows your shoulder greater mobility, but also leaves it more susceptible to injury.

Shoulder injuries come in two basic forms; those that develop from repetitive stresses and postures and those that develop suddenly as a result of a sports or work related injury. However, even when there is a sudden injury there is usually a reason why a particular joint is affected while others, also close at hand, seem unaffected. There has to be something that makes it the weak link. That something is most likely repetitive stresses and repetitive poor posture that gradually create imbalances in the muscles that surround the shoulder, setting you up for injury. Most common shoulder injuries develop in this way.

Common shoulder conditions

Rotator cuff strain or tear: occurs when the rotator cuff muscles are weak and become overly or suddenly stretched

Bursitis: occurs due to excessive pressure on the bursa as a result of over-tight muscles and/or direct pressure (often due to sleeping on the shoulder)

Impingement: results from repetitive motions such as overhead work or overhead sport activities like throwing a baseball

Tendinitis: results from almost any repetitive motion



The Spine Connection

Your spine is involved in every move you make. It is the anchor to which the muscles of your shoulders are connected. A weak or injured spine will cause other areas of your body to compensate and set them up for injury. Likewise, weakness or injury to other joints (such as your shoulder) will cause your spine to compensate and set it up for injury. But what does that mean? Compensations are subtle changes in the way that you move that are caused by pain or weakness. If a muscle is weak or a joint is painful when you move it in a certain way, you will naturally avoid moving it that way. You will compensate. This handy adaptation can help you in the short-term, but if the pain or weakness persists for too long, the extra stress on the “helper” joints and muscles may become problematic. The original injury may start to spread.

The area of the spine most closely linked to the shoulder is the neck and upper back. Here numerous muscles create a direct connection between the spine and the shoulder. Repetitive motions and bad postures often affect both areas equally. Here too are the areas which can radiate pain into the shoulder when a spinal disc or nerve is affected.

Simple ways to keep your shoulders healthy

Avoid sleeping on your side

Sit/stand with your shoulders pulled slightly back and down and lengthen your spine from floor to ceiling

Make chest muscle stretches a part of your daily routine

Get regular Chiropractic check-ups

Always warm-up before engaging in sports, exercise or stretches

Carry your purse in your hands or with the strap crossing from your opposite shoulder to your hip

Keep purses, backpacks and other bags with shoulder straps light and small

If you or someone you know suffers from shoulder problems we would love to help them.

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