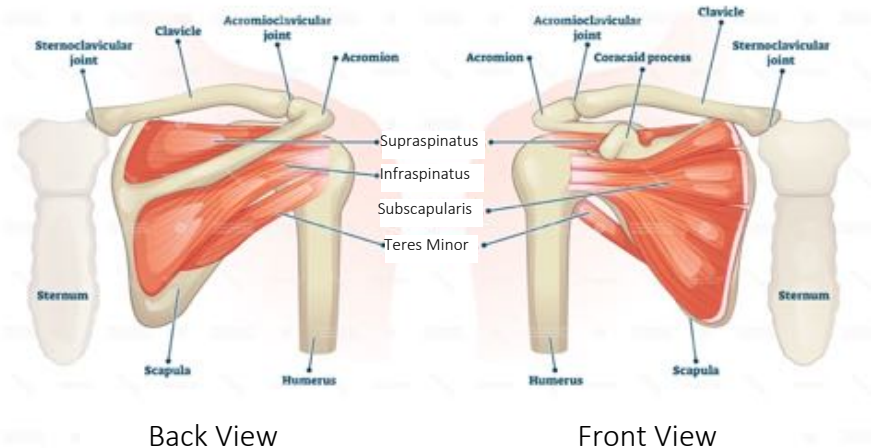


THE SHOULDER

The shoulder is the most mobile and complex joint in the human body. There are three bones that make up the shoulder: upper arm bone (humerus), shoulder blade (scapula) and collarbone (clavicle).

The rotator cuff is a group of four muscles that support the shoulder. It consists of the supraspinatus, infraspinatus, subscapularis and teres minor. These four muscles form a cuff around the joint with the tendons connecting the muscles to the bone. The rotator cuff is the primary stabilizer of the joint during any movements of the shoulder.



There are many different structures in the shoulder that can result in pain. A detailed history and assessment can help to determine the nature of your shoulder injury and recommendations for treatment. Your healthcare professional will determine if and what imaging may be necessary, with the first step generally being an x-ray. An ultrasound and/or MRI may be valuable if surgery is being considered.

Not all shoulder injuries require surgery – the majority of shoulder injuries can improve with a 3-6 month course of physiotherapy and home exercises. Physiotherapy and home exercises are the most important part of your treatment plan. Seeing a physiotherapist is important to identify your specific limitations and functional goals and provide an individualized exercise program. Cortisone injections and/or medications can be used to help reduce pain, improve your ability to do your exercises and provides longer lasting benefits. We generally caution against multiple shoulder injections and recommend discussing repeat injections with your physician.

MANAGING YOUR SHOULDER PAIN

PAIN CONTROL – Consider using heat or ice for short term pain relief, use whatever feels best to you! Pain medication such as acetaminophen, aspirin or ibuprofen can help reduce your pain and allow you to start exercising. Check with your doctor first to ensure that the pain medication is right for you if you have other medical conditions. Take the recommended dose and intervals to manage your pain. If your pain is not improving with over-the-counter medication see your doctor to discuss other options.

POSTURE – Posture affects our shoulder blade position where the rotator cuff muscles are attached. Good posture prevents impingement, giving space for the rotator cuff to move through when you lift your arms. It also recruits the muscles that attach your shoulder blades to your spine (scapular muscles). When you use these muscles, your rotator cuff has support when you lift your arms or anything of weight. Without these muscles, your rotator cuff has to strain more to lift your arm, which can cause pain.

STAY ACTIVE! – Staying active with activities that don't increase your shoulder pain can be helpful in your recovery. Go for a walk, ride a stationary bike or work on lower body and core strengthening exercises.

DO's and DON'Ts – As a general rule, **if it hurts don't do it**. However, continuing to move your shoulder in a gentle fashion is important to help you heal and keep your shoulder from getting stiff. Consider doing gentle stretching and postural exercises often throughout the day.



Consider trying this pendulum exercise, which some patients have found helpful for their pain.

Bend at the waist so your arm is dangling down. You may want to hold onto a table or chair for support. Gently rock your body weight in a circular motion to move your arm in a circular pattern about the size of a dinner plate. Do this 10 times in both a clockwise and counter clockwise direction.

Here are a few additional things to consider to help reduce aggravation / pain in your shoulder:

- Keep all arm and hand movement in front of your body (i.e. do not reach into the back seat of your car)
- Minimize prolonged repetitive positions and activities at or above shoulder height initially
- Avoid heavy lifting, pushing or pulling with the affected arm at home or at the gym
- Avoid long lever lifting. Keep anything of weight or load close to your body. Think of the 'front burner of the stove' rule by bringing the objects closer to you and not lifting with your arms extended.

POSITIONING – You can help relieve your pain by using positions that reduce tension on the shoulder. Here are some ideas to try when sitting and lying down:

Sitting: use an arm rest or pillow under your elbow to support your arm.

Lying on your back: place a pillow or folded towel under your elbow and upper arm to keep it level or above the midline of your body. You may also find having the pillow placed under your arm and chest more comfortable.

Side Lying: Many people find it very uncomfortable or painful to lie on the injured or painful side. When lying on your unaffected side, you may want to place a large pillow in front of you to support the arm. Some patients have found it helpful to sleep in a more upright position such as in a recliner or propped up on pillows.



For more information, check out the resources on our website!



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Special thanks to the physiotherapists at Access Orthopaedics and Edmonton Bone and Joint Clinic for their contributions to this resource.
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