

Shoulder Injuries

By Brian Beise

EXPERT ADVICE

Warning Signs

If you are experiencing pain in your shoulder, ask yourself these questions:

- Is your shoulder stiff? Can you rotate your arm in all the normal positions?
- Does it feel like your shoulder could pop out or slide out of the socket?
- Do you lack the strength in your shoulder to carry out your daily activities?

If you answered "yes" to any one of these questions, you should consult an orthopaedic surgeon for help in determining the severity of the problem.

Source: American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

The shoulder girdle has the highest range of motion of any joint in the body. That means it's prone to a wide variety of complex injuries. Approximately 7.5 million people go to the doctor with a shoulder problem every year, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS).

Sports-related shoulder injuries can be acute (due to sudden trauma) or chronic



(caused by overuse, poor equipment, or bad technique over time). However, the majority of sports-related shoulder injuries are chronic, perhaps due to the athletic instinct to "play through" the pain.

CHRONIC INJURIES

Chronic shoulder injuries are common in sports like baseball, softball, swimming, and tennis. Among the most common chronic shoulder injuries are tendonitis, "frozen shoulder," and impingement.

- Tendonitis refers to inflammation of the tendons.
- Frozen shoulder, which often follows an injury, refers to general stiffness, pain, and limited range of movement caused by scar tissue that reduces flexibility.
- Impingement occurs when one or more of the tendons within the shoulder joint are pinched.

Chronic shoulder injuries are best treated with rest. Depending on their location, type,

and severity, treatment may include first aid measures, physical therapy, medicine, and in some cases, surgery.

ACUTE INJURIES

Acute shoulder injuries are usually caused by falling on an outstretched arm, direct blows, or abnormal twisting. The most common acute shoulder injuries are to the rotator cuff—of those 7.5 million patients noted by the AAOS, more than 4 million had rotator cuff trouble. The rotator cuff is a group of muscles that stabilizes the shoulder in motion. If not monitored, the shoulder rotation used in bowling, pitching, swimming, and kayaking can easily lead to tears in rotator cuff muscles.

Treatments for acute injuries like rotator cuff tears are limited. Ice can reduce swelling, rest in a sling can allow motion during the day without disturbing the arm, and strengthening exercises and physical therapy can aid in rehabilitation. If these non-surgical methods don't work, a doctor may recommend surgery. ☑