

## Shoulder Pain

The shoulder is a mechanical marvel, allowing the most mobility of any joint in the body. Unfortunately, it lacks stability, commonly leading to injury. The shoulder is prone to injury by trauma, such as a fall, but more commonly becomes problematic for no apparent reason, due to overuse or adverse biomechanics. Stability, control, and movement of the shoulder rely heavily on properly functioning muscles. While pain and dysfunction can be due to structural conditions, such as arthritis, shoulder issues are predominantly due to soft tissue problems.

### Some Shoulder Issues Include:

**Rotator Cuff Tendinopathy/Tears:** The rotator cuff consists of four separate muscles that surround and control the shoulder. Those whose jobs include frequent overhead activity are particularly susceptible to injury. The most common symptom is shoulder pain when raising the arm. Symptoms can worsen quickly, making sleep and daily activities painful and difficult. [The primary goal of treatment is to re-establish normal mechanics and provide healthy stimulation to the musculature to support tissue healing.](#) Proper posture plays a key role in recovery, especially when performing overhead motion.

**Bursitis/Impingement:** A rotator cuff tendon and bursal tissue reside in a small space between the humerus (arm bone) and scapula (shoulder blade). Due to poor positioning and/or improper mechanics, these structures can become irritated. This condition is treated by postural correction, particularly of the mid-back, and re-training and strengthening of the rotator cuff musculature.

## What can physical therapy do for Shoulder pain?

Physical therapy focuses on the re-establishment of normal movement strategies of the shoulder complex (the shoulder and the shoulder blade) through exercise, hands-on therapy, and, where needed, addressing soft tissue irritation caused by dysfunctional movement. Commonly, diagnostic imaging, such as MRI, shows tears in muscles and age-related changes in the shoulder; however, current research supports the success of physical therapy at returning many patients to their original function without surgery.

### Treatments for Shoulder pain

**Manual Therapy:** Stretching, massage, mobilizations and/or manipulation have proven effective in treating shoulder pain. These techniques are often applied to the shoulder, neck, and/or mid-back region. Transverse friction massage is a specific type of manual therapy that is often applied to painful tissues to speed the healing process.

**Exercise:** Strengthening the rotator cuff and shoulder blade muscles to provide normal movement patterns, stabilizing the shoulder, allowing pain-free full range of motion. Stretching can be valuable in reducing or warding off Adhesive Capsulitis, or Frozen Shoulder, commonly seen with rotator cuff issues.

**TENS:** A type of electrical stimulation that can be beneficial in decreasing pain before or after exercise.

**Therapeutic Ultrasound:** Uses ultrasonic waves to improve healing and blood flow to inflamed structures in the shoulder, allowing improved tolerance to exercise and activity.

**Iontophoresis:** The use of electrical stimulation to push anti-inflammatory medication through the skin, reducing the pain and inflammation of irritated tissues.

**Taping:** The use of various types of tape and methodologies, including Kinesio Taping and McConnell Taping, to enhance joint support, muscular function, and blood flow. This intervention is commonly used by professional athletes.