

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Marc Schroeder & Dr. Fred Miller

Keep Shoulders Injury-Free With Chiropractic

You've probably heard the following phrases hundreds of times: "Put your shoulder into it" and "Shoulder, don't shirk, your responsibilities."

But how often do you really think about your shoulders, asks your doctor at Doctors Chiropractic.

Shoulder Injury Prevention From Your doctor at Doctors Chiropractic

- ✓ Schedule regular chiropractic checkups.
- ✓ Plan frequent breaks, warm up and cool down properly if you play sports that involve repetitive throwing or arm rotation — or your work involves frequent lifting (especially placing things on shelves). Ask your doctor at Doctors Chiropractic to recommend exercises tailored specifically for your individual diagnosis.
- ✓ Apply ice in covered packs at 15-minute intervals if your shoulder feels sore after excessive use.
- ✓ Make an immediate appointment for a chiropractic checkup if you experience any symptoms of shoulder pain or discomfort.
- ✓ Beware. If you neglect to have your shoulder checked at the onset of symptoms, the pain may lessen or go away. But don't convince yourself that's the end of your shoulder problems; you still need a checkup.
- ✓ While a torn tendon may "patch" itself if the bursa overlaying the rotator cuff envelops the damaged tendon — thus decreasing pain — this doesn't reverse the damage and can't be considered a "cure."
- ✓ Listen to your doctor. Your doctor at Doctors Chiropractic takes care to consider both regular activity levels and general physical condition when planning a rehabilitation program.
- ✓ If you've suffered a rotator cuff injury and regularly participate in sports or other strenuous pursuits that involve heavy use of your shoulders, ask your chiropractor when it's safe to return to these activities.



Your doctor at Doctors Chiropractic encourages patients to get to know their shoulders, particularly the set of muscles and ligaments known as the rotator cuffs, and learn how to keep them healthy and strong. Why? Because as a holistic health-care provider, your doctor at Doctors Chiropractic focuses on preventing disease and injury.

A Rotator What?

Each shoulder features a rotator cuff: soft tissue that surrounds the ball-and-socket joint where the arm attaches to the trunk of the body.

The cuff is created by four short muscles — the supraspinatus, infraspinatus, teres minor and subscapularis (SITS) — which originate at the shoulder blade. These muscles wrap around the shoulder where their tendons fuse into a "cuff" of tissue that connects the shoulder blade to the upper-arm bone. Shoulder rotation is controlled by the contraction and relaxation of the SITS muscles.

Just like a squeaky wheel, the rotator cuff is easy to take for granted when it works properly but extremely difficult to ignore when it's not.

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Rotator cuffs are vulnerable to repetitive strain injury if subjected to overuse. The most common rotator cuff ailment is *tendonitis*, a painful inflammation of the cuff's tendons.

Who's at Risk?

Athletes involved in sports like baseball, tennis, handball or swimming — activities that require repeated rotation of the shoulder or reaching upward and forward — are particularly susceptible to injury. Also at high risk are individuals whose work requires constant arm raising or keeping shoulders in an elevated position.

"Construction workers exposed to routine overhead work have high rates of shoulder pain that frequently progresses to functional loss and disability," reported the authors of one study (*Occup Environ Med* 2003;60:841-9).

If an individual ignores the inflammation and continues elevating the arm — or if the strain on the cuff is sudden and severe — tendons may tear. The supraspinatus tendon, the uppermost tendon of the rotator cuff, is the most likely victim. But in cases of extreme trauma, the infraspinatus and teres minor tendons can be afflicted as well. Isolated injury to an individual rotator cuff tendon is another possible, al-

though less frequent, source of shoulder trouble.

Repetitive strain also leads to degeneration of the shoulder joint, another leading factor in disorders of the rotator cuff (*Eur J Radiol* 2000;35:88-102). Repeated stretching of the rotator cuff may throw the shoulder joints out of balance. In this case, instead of pain — or in addition to it — the shoulder will develop a weak, loose feeling. The muscle contractions will have lost their "timing" and will no longer function smoothly together (*J Shoulder Elbow Surg* 2003;12:422-6).

Too Close for Comfort

Sometimes, vulnerability to rotator cuff injury is rooted in the structure of the shoulder itself.

The supraspinatus tendon runs directly under the acromion bone, the latter of which is located on top of the shoulder blade.

If the tendon and the bone are set too close together, or there is a bone spur (rough spot) on the front edge of the acromion, the supraspinatus and its adjacent bursa (the "pillow" of protective cartilage that helps lubricate the joint) may be pinched against the bone whenever the arm is raised forward. If

this happens frequently enough, the tendons and tissue enter into a chronic state of inflammation known as chronic impingement syndrome (CIS). This syndrome is usually characterized by shoulder pain but can generate symptoms in the neck as well (*J Bone Joint Surg Am* 2003;85-A:635-8).

And It Gets Worse ...

If CIS remains untreated, the tendons may actually separate from the bone. The shoulder will then become weak or numb and lose some of its power of movement. This condition is called rotator cuff disease, despite the fact it's more of an injury than an actual disease.

Rotator cuff disease is a severe condition that may result in permanent shoulder damage. Traditionally, this abnormality was repaired with surgery. However, surgery is not always effective; many patients suffer severe postoperative pain and may never recover full range of movement (*Can J Anaesth* 2003;50:265-9).

Then there's the high cost of surgery to be considered, not to mention the risks of multiple surgeries.

The advantage of chiropractic care for rotator cuff injury is its natural, multifaceted approach. Instead of invasive surgery, chiropractors use gentle, safe maneuvers called *chiropractic adjustments*, combined with specific exercises and physiotherapy that prove effective in alleviating shoulder pain (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 1994;17:43-53).

What's more, research shows that chiropractic succeeds in ending a vicious circle of surgery-relapse-surgery-relapse (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2001;24:425-30).



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