



Shoulder Pain



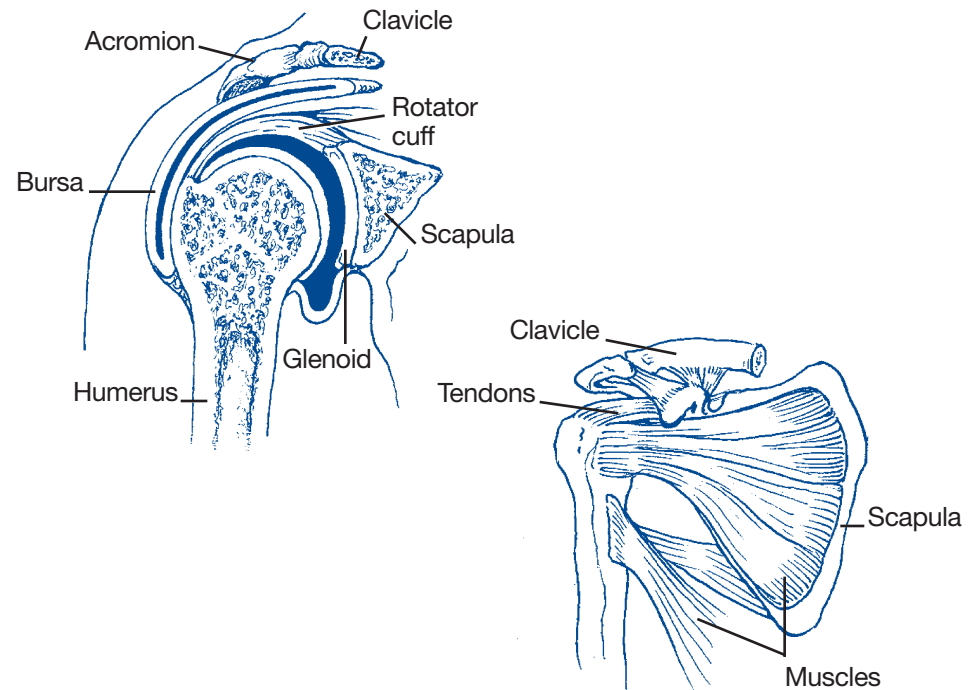
Common causes of shoulder pain

Persistent pain and loss of mobility in your shoulder can have a number of causes. One of these is **bursitis**, which occurs when the bursa (the small sac of fluid located near the acromioclavicular joint) becomes swollen and tender. Another cause is **shoulder impingement** — a condition in which the rotator cuff (comprised of tendons and muscles that surround and stabilize the shoulder) becomes damaged from repetitive stress or from an injury, such as a torn tendon.

A common sports injury, a **rotator cuff tear** — or a tear in the muscles and tendons that surround the upper arm bone — may develop suddenly from a single, traumatic movement or gradually from overuse.

YOUR SHOULDER is one of the most complex joints in the body and is comprised of several components. The top end of the upper arm bone, called the humerus, is shaped like a ball. It fits neatly into the shoulder blade socket, called the glenoid. Muscles, tendons and ligaments complete the setup.

Because of its complexity, the shoulder provides a versatility of movement that is unmatched by other joints. It is also one of the joints most susceptible to injury or disease.



Damage to the cartilage — the smooth tissue that prevents friction as the bones move against one another — also can occur in the shoulder joint. This damage is often caused by **degenerative arthritis** and can produce pain, swelling, stiffness and creaking of the joint.

Frozen shoulder, a term that describes loss of mobility and range of motion, may be caused by soft tissue inflammation. Other forms of shoulder pain can be caused by an injury, such as dislocation, or by overuse.

Symptoms that you shouldn't ignore

Shoulder pain and loss of mobility are sometimes caused by minor injuries that heal easily with self-help measures, such as resting, placing ice on the affected area and using over-the-counter medications to reduce pain and swelling.



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In most people, however, the pain and loss of mobility will be persistent, recurrent or severe. Symptoms of a shoulder problem that requires medical intervention include:

- Pain that radiates over the shoulder and into the arm or awakens you from sleep
- Weakness or an inability to move the shoulder or arm
- Stiffness, swelling or popping of the joint
- Pain that becomes sharper during movements such as pushing, pulling and reaching overhead

Because most causes of shoulder pain will continue to progress unless treated, it is important to seek medical intervention early.

Diagnosis and treatment

To diagnose the cause of shoulder pain, your doctor will ask you about your symptoms and conduct a physical examination to check for tenderness, weakness, instability and loss of mobility. An X-ray or another diagnostic test may also be needed to determine the extent of damage.

Once the cause of your shoulder pain has been identified, your doctor will recommend a treatment plan designed to eliminate or reduce symptoms and improve mobility. The treatment program for shoulder pain may include:

- Anti-inflammatory medications to reduce swelling and alleviate pain.
- Injections of steroids directly into the joint to provide long-lasting symptom relief.
- An exercise program to strengthen the rotator cuff and improve flexibility.

Nonsurgical techniques are effective in relieving symptoms in most cases. In some patients, however, surgery may be needed to repair damage to the rotator cuff and/or shoulder joint. Depending on the cause, location and extent of damage, your doctor may elect to perform surgery using traditional open techniques, or he or she may want to use minimally invasive, arthroscopic techniques.

In arthroscopic surgery, the physician will insert a tiny video camera and operating instruments into the joint through a few small incisions in the skin. The camera allows your doctor to view his or her work on a monitor, while the small instruments allow the removal or repair of damaged tissue.

Open surgery is often used to repair damage to soft tissue, such as muscles and tendons, while arthroscopic surgery may be recommended for use in repairing damage to the joint. If surgery is necessary, your doctor will discuss the option that is best for you.

In addition, shoulder replacement surgery may also be a promising option for some patients with advanced arthritis of the glenohumeral joint. This treatment is considered when nonsurgical treatments such as medications and physical therapy no longer control symptoms. During surgery, the physician removes the humeral head alone or both the humeral head and the glenoid, and replaces them with prosthetics engineered from metal and plastic. This eliminates pain, creaking and stiffness, and provides most patients with a near-normal level of functioning.

Outlook for patients

Most shoulder conditions can be treated effectively using either conservative or surgical therapies. Strength and range of motion can often be restored, and many patients are able to resume their normal activities. Your doctor can provide more information on the outlook after treatment for your specific condition.