

Orthopaedic Connection

The Rotator Cuff

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Most of my patients call the Rotator Cuff the Rotator *Cup*. Well, that's OK I know what they are referring to and at least they got the first part right.

They also know it is in the shoulder and when things go wrong with it – IT HURTS.

Age

If you like baseball I am sure at least one pitcher on your favorite team has had surgery for a torn rotator cuff.

Yes, a lot of baseball players do develop rotator cuff damage. Baseball players are usually in the 20 – 35 age group. The reality is that 95% of rotator cuff tears happen in people age 55 and older.

What Is The Cuff Anyway?

The Rotator Cuff is 4 tendons which of course are attached to their separate muscles. The tendons blend together to surround the ball part of the shoulder (humeral head). Never mind the names of the tendons/muscles! It's my job to know all that stuff. I'll be happy if you remember it's the Cuff not Cup.

These 4 tendons stabilize the shoulder ball and socket and control rotation and movement.

Why Do Cuffs Tear?

With age and repeated use the tendons that attach the rotator cuff muscles to the bone gradually degenerate and become worn and frayed. Tiny tears develop in the tissues (tendinosis). If inflammation develops in the tendons it is referred to as tendinitis.

It is really hard to tear a healthy rotator cuff. 99% of the time a cuff tears because of underlying wear changes that the person may not have been aware of. That's why even a fairly minor trauma to the shoulder can seem to cause a tear to occur.

Causes

The rotator cuff tendons don't have a very good blood supply unfortunately. This makes it hard for the tendons to repair themselves when injured. Other factors are –

- Overuse of the shoulder (arm above the head)
- Trauma to the shoulder
- Shoulder dislocations
- Genetics
- Diabetes, Rheumatoid arthritis, smoking
- Use of cortisone
- Tennis, swimming, weight lifting

Symptoms

There are several symptoms, but pain is the most frequent.

- Pain in the front of the shoulder
- Pain down outside part of arm below the shoulder

- Maybe worse pain at night
- Weakness raising the arm
- Feeling of popping or catching with movement

I am out of space this week because this is a large subject. I would like to wait till next week to completely cover diagnosis and treatment of rotator cuff injuries. Could you please come back then? Thanks!

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website

I sincerely hope all of our loyal readers will take advantage of an endless amount of musculoskeletal information. It is easy! Log onto www.orthopodsurgeon.com.

It gives access to all Website articles, Your Orthopaedic Connection and every GCH article from most recent to the first. Full text! It covers everything I do in the office and hospital.

Good Health. Good life. All the best to you.

Dr. Haverbush