

## SHOULDER EXERCISES AND INJURIES - ROTATOR CUFF INJURY

Shoulder exercises are an integral part of most workout routines – overdoing it can lead to painful injury.

The shoulders are among the most aesthetically pleasing parts of the body, and many workout regimes include specific exercises to keep them looking good. Men work on developing strong, broad shoulders, while women go for the more shapely look. Unfortunately the shoulder is one part of the body that may suffer injury if not worked correctly.

There are three areas in the shoulder – the anterior (front) deltoid, the lateral (side) deltoid, and the posterior (rear) deltoid. Although this is all one muscle, it is possible to target the specific areas with different exercises. Apart from helping you look good and feel confident about your body, exercising your shoulders will make daily functioning that much easier. Of course, it is important not to concentrate on any one area of the body; your resistance training should target all muscle groups equally.

### How Often?

As with all muscles, you can perform shoulder exercises up to three non-consecutive days a week. If you are lifting weights (so heavy that you can complete only six to eight repetitions) you will need at least two days' rest before you perform the exercise again. For this reason, you may work your shoulders only once or twice a week. If your goal is toning, stick to one to three sets of 12 repetitions and have a least one day's rest before you perform the exercises again. Be aware that you also use your shoulders in chest and back exercises, so it is recommended that you do those first.

### Which Exercises?

Most shoulder exercises are “pushing” exercises and generally involve pressing a weight over, or away from, your body. This group includes the overhead press and lateral raises. Other popular exercises include front raises and upright rows. Stretching before and after a workout helps to keep the shoulder healthy. The muscles often get tight, so stretching them for a minimum of 30 seconds two to three times will help counteract this.

### Shoulder injuries

The shoulder, frequently described as a ball and socket joint, is the most mobile in the body. It achieves this high degree of mobility by being inherently unstable. The joint relies heavily on the complex interconnections of the surrounding muscles, tendons and ligaments. The muscular system is of particular importance, as it provides stability under movement.

In people over 40, a common cause of shoulder pain is a tear of the rotator cuff. This may result suddenly from a single traumatic event such as a fall, or develop gradually because of a repetitive overhead activity, such as serving at tennis. Many experts believe that repeated overload leads to degeneration in the region of the rotator cuff, which in time causes the thinning of the tissue and, ultimately, the rotator cuff tearing. These tears vary in severity. Broadly speaking, they fall into two categories – partial thickness or full thickness. Partial-thickness tears do not completely sever

the tendon, and, as function is retained, usually respond well to physiotherapy and rehabilitation. Full-thickness tears are generally more complex and often require surgery.

You also risk tearing the rotator cuff if you perform too much heavy lifting. Elderly people who use their arms for extra leverage when rising from a chair can unwittingly fall victim to this type of injury.

## **Signs and Symptoms of Rotator Cuff Injury**

Recurrent, constant pain is often felt in the shoulder region when performing activities, accompanied by catching and grating or a cracking sound when the arm is moved. This pain often increases at night and usually prevents you from sleeping on the affected side.

As the condition develops, muscle weakness becomes apparent. Over time, this results in reduced range of motion of the shoulder. It is important to visit your GP or qualified therapist to confirm the nature of the injury and exclude any other problem that may manifest itself as shoulder pain.

## **Treatment of Rotator Cuff Injuries**

In most cases, the initial treatment of a rotator cuff injury is non-surgical. Rest may help reduce pain, particularly if combined with medication. David West, of Metis-physiotherapy centres, advises that simple injuries respond well to exercise rehabilitation in which the sufferer learns to position the shoulder blade correctly to allow smooth, pain-free movement.

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