

Rotator Cuff Problems & Solutions

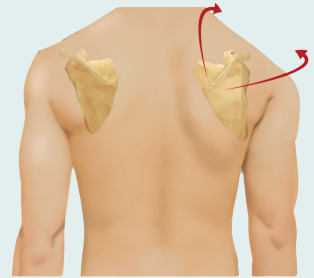
Your **rotator cuff** is a group of four muscles that help move your shoulder. Strains and injuries to the rotator cuff are the most common cause of shoulder problems, accounting for 4.5 million healthcare visits each year. (1)

Problems

Less than 10% of rotator cuff tears occur from an acute injury like an abrupt fall. The remaining majority of problems occur in a slower, predictable cycle. (2)

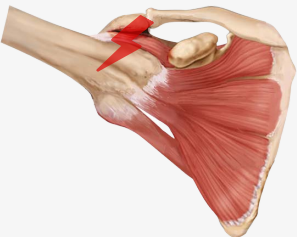
Scapular Dyskinesia

Your shoulder muscles must work in a coordinated fashion to have a healthy and stable joint. Disruption of the normal rhythm of your shoulder blade creates abnormal strain on your shoulder and rotator cuff called **scapular dyskinesia**.



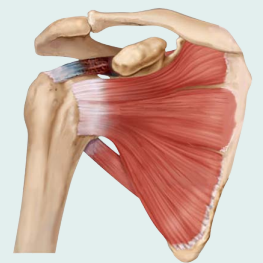
Impingement Syndrome

Scapular dyskinesia crowds the area of your shoulder where your rotator cuff tendons live and creates a painful pinching, or **impingement**, of your tendons and bursa each time you reach overhead or behind your back. (3)



Rotator Cuff Tendinopathy

While initial stressors can trigger tendon swelling and inflammation (**tendonitis**), long-standing impingement leads to a lack of blood flow where the tendon degenerates (**tendinopathy**) - think beef jerky. (4-11)



Rotator Cuff Tears

Over time, impinged and degenerated tendons begin to fray and eventually tear. Rotator cuff tears progress in much the same way that a dried-out rope is damaged by repeatedly being struck by a dull stone.

- A **partial tear** means that one side of your tendon is partially frayed.
- A **full-thickness tear** describes a slit or buttonhole in your tendon, much like what would be created by running a knife length-wise down a rope.
- A **rupture** is the most serious injury because your tendon has been torn into two pieces.



While young patients who have suffered an acute tear or rupture may require surgery, most others will benefit from conservative treatments, like the type provided by chiropractors.

Surgery?

Multiple studies have shown no advantage for surgery vs. conservative care for rotator cuff tears. (12-17)
One large study summarized the current consensus on uncomplicated tears:

"[Surgery] may provide little or no clinically important benefits with respect to pain, function, overall quality of life or ... treatment success when compared with non-operative treatment." (12)

Conservative care should be the first choice for most rotator cuff tears (18-21) Non-surgical management of partial-thickness, and chronic full-thickness tears yields good outcomes (29-31) that rival or surpass surgical results. (21-23)

A well-developed conservative care plan will include multiple strategies:



Joint manipulation



Rehab exercises



Soft tissue treatments



Lifestyle advice



Therapy modalities

Chiropractors have become the logical first choice for rotator cuff problems. Their skillset includes spinal manipulation, a proven technique that decreases shoulder pain while improving mobility and function. (24-28)

If you or someone you know has shoulder pain, call your chiropractor today!

Watch this short rotator cuff explainer video to learn more.

