

the shoulder guide

Your shoulders are incredibly flexible joints that allow your arms to move through a large range of motion. They are used in almost every activity and they take a lot of punishment on a daily basis. As a result, they are prone to a wide range of injuries. It's important to take good care of your shoulders because even small problems can quickly become debilitating if not taken care of immediately.

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shoulder problems

The shoulder is prone to a variety of problems that can give you pain and limit your range of motion. Many of these are simply caused by wear and tear. For example, a common injury is tendinitis of one of the rotator cuff muscles called the supraspinatus. Through poor posture or overuse, the tendon becomes inflamed and painful. When the bursa becomes inflamed you develop what is known as bursitis. This can be extremely painful.

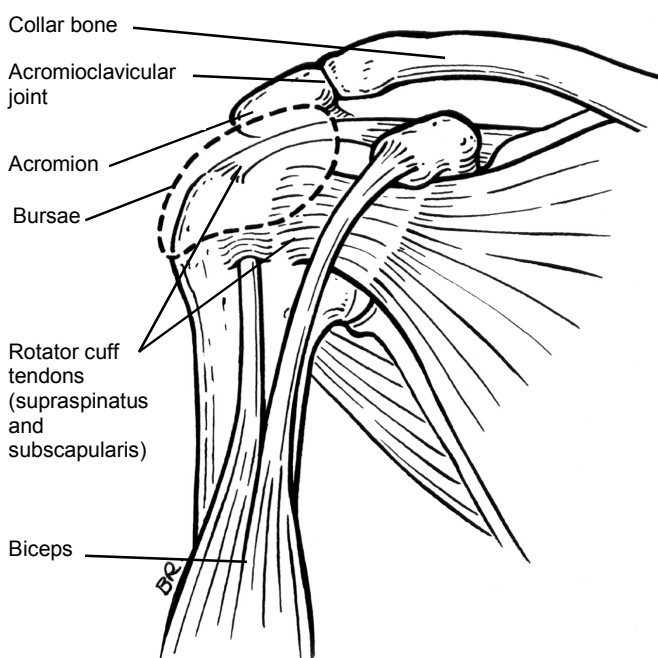
Trigger points, small knots in the muscles, are very common around the shoulder and can refer pain and tenderness into the muscles or joints. The referred pain can mimic other shoulder problems like tendinitis and frozen shoulder.

Sprains and dislocations typically result from falls. It's natural to reach your arm out to catch yourself when falling, but the impact can strain or tear the shoulder ligaments. If the impact is severe enough, the humerus may be knocked right out of the socket and the shoulder becomes dislocated.

With a severe trauma, the bones may actually fracture or break. The collarbone is most likely to break although the humerus can sometimes break as well. When this happens the arm needs to be immobilized. Fractures can take up to three months to heal.

Whenever you have a shoulder problem, you tend

a quick anatomy lesson



The shoulder is made up of three bones. The humerus is the big bone in your upper arm. The clavicle (collar bone) attaches to your rib cage at one end and helps keep your shoulder out to the side of your body. The scapula (shoulder blade) is the third bone. Part of the scapula, the acromion, juts out and forms a roof over the top of the joint. Another part of the scapula forms a socket into which the round head of the humerus fits.

The upper arm is held in its socket by loose ligaments and four small rotator cuff muscles that cover the joint like a sleeve. Other back, chest and upper arm muscles help support and move the shoulder.

There is also a fluid filled sac in the shoulder called a bursa. This bursa is like a cushion that helps prevent the tendons from rubbing against the bones.

to limit your movement to minimize the pain. This can lead to frozen shoulder. Your shoulder becomes stiff and you quickly lose mobility. It can soon become extremely painful to lift your arm. If you develop a frozen shoulder, it will take a long time and lots of therapy to regain your normal movement. Sometimes the only option is surgery. The best medicine in this case is prevention. As soon as you develop any pain or discomfort in your shoulder, see your massage therapist immediately for assessment and treatment. Don't risk getting this serious and debilitating shoulder condition.

massage can help

Massage therapists can help when shoulder problems occur. More importantly, they can help prevent these kinds of problems from happening in the first place. Massage therapists will evaluate your shoulder through range of motion tests and other assessment procedures. They can then give you recommendations on the best course of treatment.

Their first priority is to make you feel more comfortable by getting rid of your pain. They can do this with specialized massage techniques. They may also use heat or hydrotherapy. To help the process along and to help prevent further problems your massage therapist can also give you exercises to help strengthen your shoulder and help maintain your mobility.

Many massage therapists are trained to treat trigger points. As mentioned previously, these knots mimic other common shoulder conditions and are often an overlooked source of pain.

Your massage therapist will be able to tell you if trigger points may be playing a role in your shoulder problem.

If you've injured your shoulder, your massage therapist will likely prescribe some exercises to help you regain the strength, flexibility and range of motion in your shoulder. Below are two typical exercises given to people with shoulder injuries.

shoulder care checklist

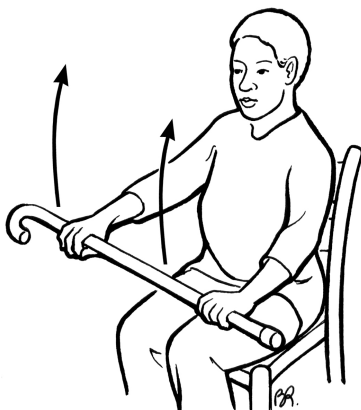
To prevent shoulder problems from occurring, always practice healthy shoulder habits.

- Maintain good posture
- Avoid excessive and repetitive use of your shoulders
- If you sit at work, take frequent breaks
- Don't put undue stress on the shoulders with heavy knapsacks or bags
- Warm up your arms before exercising
- Consult your massage therapist or doctor if you injure or develop pain in your shoulder, even if it seems minor
- Do any maintenance exercises prescribed by your massage therapist

shoulder exercises

the wand

You can stand, sit or even lie down for this exercise. Hold a cane or stick straight out in front of you. Slowly raise the "wand" as high as you can overhead. Hold the wand at the highest possible point for a couple of seconds. Lower the arms and repeat the exercise several times. By using a wand, the "good" arm helps assist the movement of the injured one. Your massage therapist may have you move the wand in other directions, such as side to side.



wall walking

Stand about 12 to 18 inches away from a wall. Slowly walk your fingers up the wall to the point where you start to feel some discomfort. Note how high you were able to go. Try the exercise again and try to go a little higher. Repeat several times. Your massage therapist may have you face the wall and use both hands or have you standing sideways to the wall and use just the injured arm.

