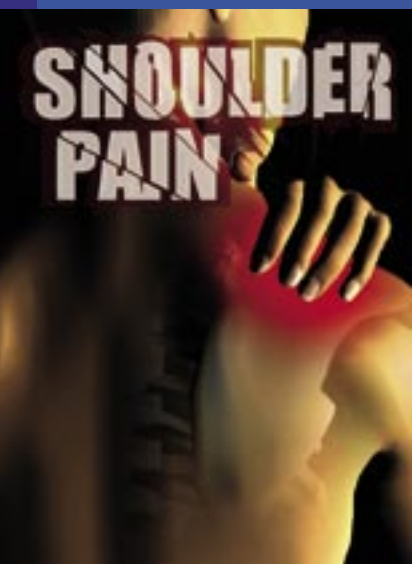


PERSONAL MESSAGE

## the Challenge of Treating Shoulder Pain

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Shoulder pain is one of the most demanding disorders for a physical therapist to treat. This type of injury requires a complete investigation into the cause of the patient's symptoms, its effect on their daily activities and the formulation of an effective treatment approach. In order to choose the most effective treatment method, it is very important to acquire a complete medical history from the patient and their doctor to determine which structures and activities are the primary causes of the pain. The therapist can then isolate the treatment approach that will best allow the injury to heal, while at the same time prevent further pain or loss of function.

Some simple questions that provide valuable information for determining the best treatment approach are: What type of pain is it? Is it a sharp pain, dull pain, pain with movement or pain at rest? Does the neck or whole arm hurt? This helps to tell the therapist what parts of the shoulder might be involved and whether or not the neck might have a role in your shoulder pain. Pinpointing the

structures involved and reproducing the symptoms within the examination allows the therapist to focus on the source of the problem and not just treat the symptoms!

Once the primary source of the shoulder pain is localized, the right combination of treatment modalities, hands-on techniques, movement re-education and exercise is formulated in order to get the patient out of pain and speedily back to full function!

The demanding challenge of treating shoulder pain shares with it an equally satisfying reward when you get to the end of a treatment program and hear the patient's success story. It's exciting to hear how physical therapy has allowed so many patients to return to the activities they love without pain or limitations.



Bruce Snell—Owner, NW Sports Physical Therapy

# SHOULDER PAIN

## RISK FACTORS THAT CAUSE SHOULDER PAIN AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

By Gaynor Hale, Physical Therapist



**M**any people with shoulder problems suffer needlessly because of a delay in treatment. Early symptoms of a shoulder problem that people often ignore are pain in the front or back of the shoulder, difficulty reaching into a back pocket, aching at night or a sharp twinge when raising the arm.

The shoulder is a complex joint and used all day as we go about our busy lives. Because of this it is often injured or overused. By the time an individual feels pain or experiences any loss of function the problem has progressed.

Shoulder conditions present themselves in various forms of inflammation (Def: “unnaturally hot and swollen”) and are caused by irritations of one sort or another. Some common types are:

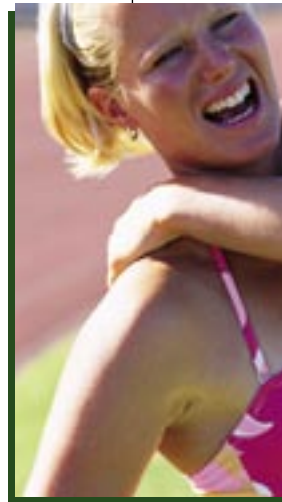
1. Tendonitis (inflammation of the tendon)
2. Bursitis (inflammation of the “bursa” or a fluid-filled sack protecting the joint)
3. Arthritis (inflammation of the joint itself)

The causes are primarily overuse, strain or injury. Painting a ceiling, playing too many tennis matches or lifting overhead too much can lead to this type of inflammation of the rotator cuff (the main muscles of the shoulder that control the motions of that joint).

Impingement (“pinching or putting pressure on”) develops when chronic or long term inflammation persists. This causes the tendon and other tissues to thicken narrowing the space under the tip of the shoulder. The more inflamed the tissue becomes and the narrower the space, the more pinching occurs causing significant pain especially when reaching the arm across the body. Left untreated

an impingement can progress to a “Frozen Shoulder” where an individual loses some or all shoulder motion.

Chronic wear and tear or an injury can lead to breakdown of the tissue. A rotator cuff tear occurs when the tendons of the rotator cuff muscles separate from the bone. Surgery is often needed to fix this condition. Traumatic injuries can lead to shoulder instability, shoulder dislocation or shoulder separation.



Finally, there are traumatic injuries and fractures that often require immediate surgery. Falling on an outstretched arm, getting slammed into during a football game or being involved in a motor vehicle accident are common causes of traumatic shoulder injuries.

As you can see there are a lot of different causes of shoulder pain and the treatment depends on the cause of the problem. For this reason it is important to seek medical advice before beginning any treatment. Physical Therapy is almost always recommended in the management of shoulder problems. In fact many Orthopedic

“Rest and medication alone are not nearly as effective as Physical Therapy intervention where the skilled provider identifies the faulty moving components, weak or tight muscles and restores normal function.”

Surgeons now recommend that Primary Care Practitioners, “Try PT First™.” The reason for this is that studies show that rest and medication alone are not nearly as effective as Physical Therapy intervention where the skilled provider identifies the faulty moving components, weak or tight muscles and restores normal function. In addition, it often takes weeks to get an appointment with a specialist, and in our managed care world, without at least a trial of conservative treatment like Physical Therapy, the specialist can’t even get expensive tests like MRIs authorized. All these delays mean more pain and suffering for the patient. The longer you wait to start treating the harder it is to fully recover in a minimum of time.

The first thing a Physical Therapist does, after reviewing the referral from the Physician, is his own special evaluation. A Physical Therapist’s skill and training gives him the ability to identify what is going to get the patient back to normal in terms of motion and function. During the evaluation, all directions of motion are measured; the muscles are tested individually and as a whole. The Physical Therapist will ask a patient a lot of questions about his pain and function, look at the patient’s posture and how he moves.

The first thing Physical Therapy will address is the pain. This may be done using ice/heat, ultrasound, and electrical stimulation. Then it’s time to begin manual intervention. A Physical Therapist is trained in just how to massage and stretch the tissue surrounding the shoulder joint so as to really make a patient feel better. Combined with precise joint mobilizations one will likely regain mobility in no time. Then depending on the problem the patient will learn specific exercise designed to re-educate, rebuild and improve the stability of his shoulder.

# Tips and Tricks

## EASY EXERCISES FOR HEALTHY SHOULDERS

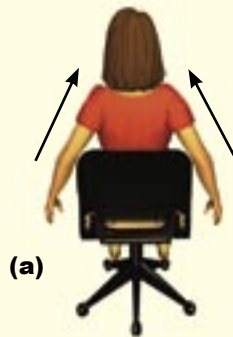
Each of these exercises can be done in sets of ten repetitions two or three times daily or as tolerated, or as directed by your Physical Therapist.



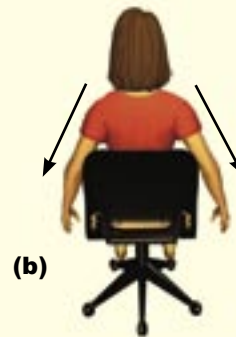
**1. (left)** Sit up with your spine very straight and tall, chin tucked in. This puts your shoulders and upper back in an ideal position.



**2. (right)** Now place your hands on each side of the seat of your chair. Keeping your elbows straight, push down lifting your butt.



(a)



(b)

**3. (left)** Shrug your shoulders up (a) and then, relaxing them, let them all the way down (b).

**4. (right)** Sitting up nice and straight, squeeze your shoulder blades together.



**5. (left)** Lying on your right side, with your left elbow at your side and your left hand across your stomach, lift your hand up toward the ceiling without taking your elbow off your side. Repeat on your other side.



**6. (left)** Standing in a doorway, forearm fully against the door jamb, lean through the doorway stretching the arm back.

**7. (right)** Facing a wall, walk your fingers up the wall until your arm is fully extended over your head. You will need to step closer to the wall as your arm goes higher.



# FAQ

## Why does my shoulder click or snap?

A tendon that is swollen can “snap” as it moves over a bone. Also there could have been some trauma to the tendon, a bone spur rubbing on the tendon or some calcium deposit in the tendon itself.

## Why is my motion restricted?

Any irritation to the joint area or to the muscles themselves will cause the muscles around that area to “guard” it by tightening and trying to prevent motion. This is a protective mechanism to prevent further irritation or injury.

## Why does it hurt to lift overhead?

Repetitive overhead work can lead to deep muscle fatigue and altered positioning of the joint. This leads to more irritation of the joint tissue. It is much harder for your muscles to control the motion in your shoulder joint when the arm is over your head because there is more

strain on it. As you lose joint control the result is more tissue irritation and pain.

## Why does my shoulder wake me up at night?

A possible cause of this is a tear in the joint tissue or irritation of a tendon in the shoulder. If you put your shoulder in certain positions it can aggravate the irritated tissue. With overhead positioning especially, there could be pinching of the tendons or tugs on the tendon or capsule.

## Why is it difficult to reach in my back pocket?

Joint irritation, pain or muscle guarding could all be a factor.

## What are the symptoms of rotator cuff problems?

Pain when you reach overhead or your arm just suddenly dropping when you lift something are the typical symptoms.

## Do you need to see a Physical Therapist for your shoulder pain? Take this simple test...

Simply place a check mark in the appropriate box. Once you are done, calculate the number of YESes and look at the results.

YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have pain when you raise your arm above your head?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does it hurt to reach?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have pain while sleeping at night?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does it hurt to lie on your shoulder?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have pain over the outside of your shoulder in the area of the upper arm?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you unable to raise your arm?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you unable to carry objects or lift something?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have pain in the front of your shoulder?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does your shoulder feel loose and unstable?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does your shoulder feel stiff and tight?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you unable to reach into your back pocket?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you unable to touch the back of your neck?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you unable to reach the back of your bra?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have pain that radiates down your arm?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does your arm feel achy and weak?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does your shoulder hurt after working out?

### Results:

#### 1 to 3 Yes:

You're doing fine. Exercising may help keep your shoulder in check.

#### 4 to 6 Yes:

Physical Therapy is an option for you.

#### 7 or more Yes:

We would advise you to see a doctor to get a better diagnosis. PT is definitely an option.





**NW WOMEN'S**  
PHYSICAL THERAPY

## **HAPPY ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY!**



**Y**es, it has been one year since we opened the doors to **NW Women's Physical Therapy** and what a great year it has been! Lisa Atkinson, MS, PT was joined by fellow physical therapist Jill Ghent, DPT, ATC in October of 2004. The knowledge and expertise that both therapists possess make for a winning team. **NW Women's Physical Therapy** is like no other physical therapy clinic in the Gig Harbor/ Tacoma area. With a dedication to women's health and wellness in a warm, inviting environment, patients are able to relax and have fun while increasing their well being.

We want to thank all of you who have helped to make this a successful year. We look forward to touching the lives of many more women as well as helping them increase their quality of life. If you haven't already stopped by to meet Lisa and Jill at **NW Women's Physical Therapy**, please do so today or call us at (253) 851-7277 to schedule an appointment.

## **What's happening at our family of clinics....**

With all the changes that are happening here at **NW Sports Physical Therapy**, we wanted to update "your family" on the happenings of "our family".

### **NW Sports Physical Therapy:**

- George Teer, PT, Cert MDT received his Certification in Mechanical Diagnosis and Therapy of the Spine from the McKenzie Institute USA.
- Laura Opstedal, DPT, CSCS received her doctorate in Physical Therapy. She also recently passed the level two test for the North American Institute of Orthopedic Manual Therapy and is currently completing level three coursework.
- Bruce Snell and Dave Andrews have been traveling with the Men's US Soccer Team to Chicago, Mexico City and Panama as the team qualifies for the 2006 World Cup.

### **NW Hand Therapy:**

- The Gig Harbor clinic moved to a bigger space located across the hall from NW Sports PT. Stop by and check out our new space!
- We are now offering Physical Capacity Evaluations (PCE's) at our Gig Harbor clinic. Cathy Elvins, OTR/L, CHT and Jackie Hicks, OTR/L, CHT are now Matheson Certified to perform these comprehensive tests.

### **NW Women's Physical Therapy:**

- We just celebrated our One Year Anniversary! Thank you to all of you who have helped to make this a great and successful year.
- Our clinic continues to grow. The addition of Lisa's son in December and Jill's baby born in July have added new members to our staff.

The mission of NW Sports Physical Therapy and its affiliates is to have satisfied patients whose lives have been improved through our services. We strive toward this mission daily to provide you with the care and service that surpasses all. We welcome your family to ours.

**Tired of having  
SHOULDER  
PAIN?**



**Come and Visit Us for a  
FREE CONSULTATION**

Find out if Physical Therapy can help you ease the pain and help you gain a new outlook on life.

**Gig Harbor: (253) 851-7472**

**Tacoma: (253) 552-2525**

Visit us on the Internet at:  
[www.nwsportspt.com](http://www.nwsportspt.com)



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**And Our Family of Clinics**



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THERAPY, INC.**

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**WE CARE ABOUT YOU!**  
Call us today for a free consultation.

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