



ROTATOR CUFF INJURY

PATIENT'S INFORMATION
BOOKLET



ROM

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What is the rotator cuff?

The rotator cuff is a group of muscles and tendons in your shoulder. They help you lift and move your arms away from your body. The rotator cuff keeps the ball of the upper arm bone in the shoulder blade socket.

What is a rotator cuff tear?

Rotator cuff tears occur when tendons pull away from the arm bone. It may result from overuse or another injury. Types of torn rotator cuffs include:

- **Partial:** With an incomplete or partial tear, the tendon still somewhat attaches to the arm bone.



- **Complete:** With a full-thickness or complete tear, the tendon separates completely from the bone.

What causes a rotator cuff tear?

An accident, such as a fall, can cause a broken collarbone or dislocated shoulder that tears the rotator cuff. More commonly, rotator cuff tears occur over time as the tendon wears down with age and use (degenerative tear). People over 40 are most at risk.

Causes of degenerative tears include:

- **Bone spurs:** Bony growths can form on the top of the shoulder bone. These bone spurs rub against the tendon when you lift



your arm. This shoulder impingement creates friction between the bone and tendon. Eventually, a partial or complete tear may occur.

- **Decreased blood flow:** Blood flow to the rotator cuff decreases as you get older. If blood doesn't nourish the tendons, they can tear.
- **Overuse:** Repetitive shoulder movements during sports or on the job can stress muscles and tendons, causing a tear.

What are risk factors for rotator cuff tears?

Anyone can experience a rotator cuff tear. These factors may increase your risk:

- Family history of shoulder problems or rotator cuff injuries.
- Poor posture.
- Smoking.
- Being age 40 or older.

Degenerative tears are more common among people who do repetitive shoulder movements, such as:

- Carpenters.
- Mechanics.
- Painters.
- Recreational and professional athletes who play baseball, volleyball and racket sports.



What are the symptoms of a rotator cuff tear?

Sudden tears from accidents cause immediate, intense shoulder pain and arm weakness. With degenerative tears, you may have mild pain that improves with medicines. Over time, the pain gets worse. Most people have some degree of arm and shoulder weakness. You may also experience some difficulty and pain while raising your arm, popping or clicking sounds when moving your arm, and shoulder pain that worsens at night or when resting your arm.

Do I need any tests?

Following a doctor's examination, you may need an X-ray and MRI scan or ultrasound scan of your shoulder joint to confirm diagnosis.

What is the treatment of rotator cuff tear?

A rotator cuff tear can get worse without treatment. A complete tear can make it almost impossible to move your arm. Without treatment, you may have chronic shoulder pain and find it very difficult to use the injured arm. Many patients can improve functionally and decrease pain with nonsurgical treatment by strengthening their shoulder muscles. Just because there is a tear, does not necessarily mean a surgery is needed. About eight out of 10 people with partial tears get better with nonsurgical treatments.



Surgical options

An operation is considered for complete tears or partial tears that don't respond adequately with physical therapy. You may also have surgery if your job or athletic interests affect the shoulder.

Rotator cuff repair can be performed through arthroscopic techniques using small incisions.

Some tears are not repairable due to its size and/or age of the patient and may necessitate shoulder replacement surgery.

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