

Shoulder Pain Solutions



By Jared Evans
Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist



There are many different causes of shoulder pain and understanding the source of your pain is the first step to solving the problem. If you have chronic shoulder pain that alters your movement or limits you in your chosen activity, you should get it checked by a professional. A good orthopedic doctor, chiropractor or physical therapist is a good place to start to get checked up. Once you have a better idea of where your shoulder pain is coming from, it is easier to make a plan for addressing it.

Some possible causes of shoulder pain include:

1. Strains and sprains
2. Tendonitis
3. Rotator cuff injuries
4. Arthritis
5. Instability

The shoulder is the most frequently injured joint in the upper body. This is because it is inherently unstable due to its structure. The “socket” of the shoulder is actually very shallow and the “ball” is quite large. This gives us great mobility and range of motion in our shoulder which allows us to do an amazing variety of movements.

However, this comes at the price of increased risk of injury.

Since the bony structure of the joint does not create stability, it is up to the ligaments, muscles and joint capsule of the shoulder to hold things together. This is why things such as rotator cuff tears are so common. If you think you may have a rotator cuff injury, but have never gotten a doctors opinion, do yourself a favor and get an MRI so you will know.

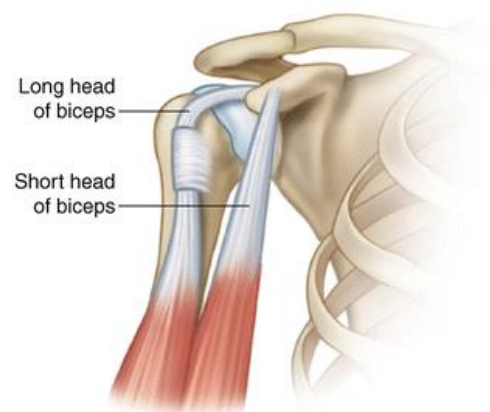
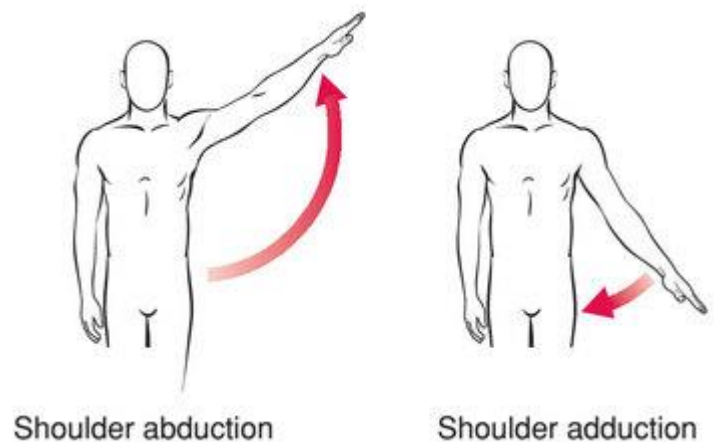
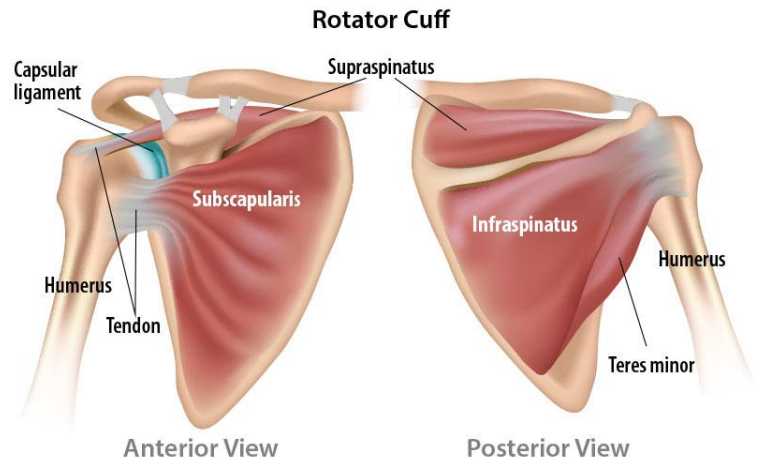


The rotator cuff is actually made of 4 separate muscles, pictured right. As a unit they act to pull the head of the humerus into the glenoid fossa. Essentially they keep the ball in the socket. Individually they perform distinct actions at the shoulder joint such as abduction which is bringing the arm away from the side of your body.

If shoulder abduction is painful or limited, it can often be from a torn supraspinatus. This rotator cuff muscle gets injured more than the others since it is small and is only assisted by **one** other muscle.

A physical therapist may assign you certain shoulder exercises to address this muscle and to strengthen it. A preventative approach will be much less painful, that is to say, don't wait for your shoulder to start hurting to strengthen it! But if you are already in pain, we have trainers who can help you to improve your shoulder's strength and range of motion.

Another common problem that many people suffer from is having a pain in the front of the shoulder that radiates down the front of the upper arm. This is usually a biceps tendon issue, which can be easier to address than you might think.



When you bend your elbow and lift your hand up by your head, as in a bicep pose, you are shortening the bicep muscle at the elbow and the shoulder. Since this muscle crosses both of these joints it gets a lot of action! Especially in sports involving overhead motions.



This also puts the bicep in a position where it is more common to suffer from overuse and inflammation. Once inflamed, it can be difficult to get rid of this pain without directly addressing the root cause. One thing that can help is stretching and strengthening these muscles to allow them to bear the repeated efforts of your sport or of life in general. I will show you exercises to accomplish that goal at the end of this report.

If you are dealing with shoulder arthritis, you likely try to avoid moving your shoulder at all costs. While this does keep you out of pain in the short term, eventually it will lead to decreased function. Finding ways to move your shoulder with minimal discomfort is extremely important.



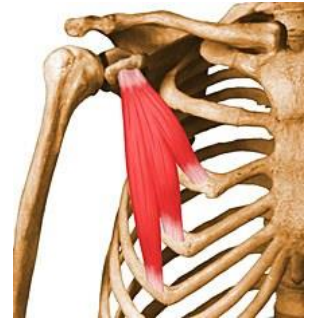
All of the major joints in our body rely on joint (synovial) fluid to exchange gas, deliver nutrients and remove waste products. However, without movement of the joint this fluid remains stagnant, and cannot do its job. So find ways to move that you can tolerate, and always look to make improvements.

In the routines that follow, we are trying to address the most common problems of restrictions from tight muscles, and instability or lack of control from weak muscles. *This is still only a starting point, and for a more personalized approach, you should come talk to me for an assessment.*

Releasing commonly tight muscles that cause shoulder pain:

These drills can be repeated 2-3 times per day, as needed.

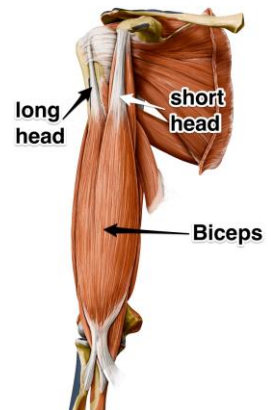
The Pec Minor: This muscle is located on the chest and attaches to the shoulder blade via the coracoid process. To release this muscle all you need is a tennis ball and a wall. Place the tennis ball near the front of the shoulder but on the ribs. Lean into the wall to apply pressure to the muscle that is beneath the tennis ball (a lacrosse ball works too).



By moving your upper body left, right, up and down you can explore this area to find the most tender/tight spot. This is where you will want to spend most of your time. Spend at least 1-2 minutes on this side before moving to the opposite side.



The Biceps Brachii (long head): This is part of the upper arm, but since this tendon crosses the shoulder joint, it is often the culprit of shoulder pain. Here is a simple test to determine if yours is tight. Stand next to a mirror and relax as much as you can. Is your elbow still bent? If so, you have tight biceps. Here is how to stretch them to alleviate pain and prevent injury.



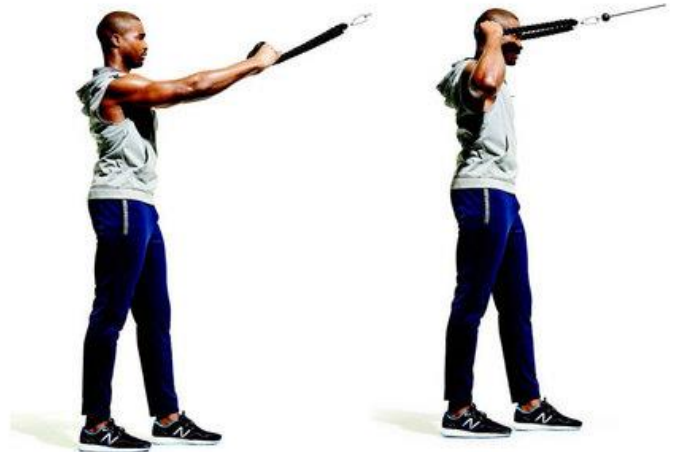
Find a wall and stand next to it. Extend your arm to your side towards the wall at shoulder height, palm up. Point your fingers down and try to touch your palm to the wall. You should feel this stretch in your bicep and forearms. Hold this stretch for at least 30 seconds on both sides.



Strengthening commonly weak muscles that cause shoulder pain:

These exercises can be done daily or every other day at a minimum.

Face Pulls: This is a fantastic exercise for the rotator cuff. You can use a pulley machine or a resistance band. Grab the handles/band with an overhand grip so your thumbs face inward towards each other. Pull your elbows out wide with your knuckles facing your temples. Do 2-3 sets of 15-20 repetitions.



Y Raise: Lay on an incline bench with light dumbbells in your hands. Hang the arms straight down, thumb side of the hand facing forwards. Lift your arms straight up and into a Y position, pause briefly at the top. 2-3 sets of 15-20 reps.



Pull-Aparts: Grab a resistance band with an overhand grip about shoulder width apart, elbows straight. Moving from the shoulders, pull the band apart until the center of the band touches your chest. Return to the start position but do not let the band go slack. 2-3 sets of 20-30 reps.

