



### **Rotator Cuff Tear**

**Definition:** The rotator cuff is a group of four muscles: supraspinatus, infraspinatus, teres minor, and subscapularis. These muscles work together to produce a great range of motion and to help stabilize the shoulder bones and joints. An injury to any combination of those muscles or their tendons is classified as a rotator cuff tear.

**Common Terms:** Torn rotator cuff is the most commonly used term.

**Typical Mechanism of Injury:** Rotator cuff tears can occur in a number of ways. One method is through repetitive overhead activities, like those seen in throwing a baseball, a tennis serve, and even with a golf swing. However, individuals who have jobs such as painting, auto mechanic, and others where the arm is required to be overhead for extended periods of time are also prone to developing rotator cuff tears. Rotator cuff tears can also occur with a single traumatic incident such as falling on an outstretched arm. It is also possible that, simply through the process of aging and usage, individuals can develop degenerative tears to the tissues of the rotator cuff.

**Common Signs and Symptoms:** Pain and weakness with lifting the arm, with lowering the arm, atrophy (muscle size shrinkage) of shoulder muscles, and crepitus (clicking and grinding) within the shoulder joint are all typical symptoms of a rotator cuff tear. Pain that wakes a person up at night is also associated with some rotator cuff tears.

**Common Treatment:** Symptoms associated with rotator cuff tears can often be addressed through rehabilitations. Pain control, range of motion, and strengthening are common treatment options. Medications may also assist with decreasing swelling and pain. In some cases, the injury may not respond successfully to rehabilitation approaches, and a surgical procedure may be required. Surgery options vary from person to person, and amongst doctors, based on things such as the extent of the injury, the goals of the person, and other factors relating to the success of a surgery to repair a torn rotator cuff.

**Prevention:** Proper strengthening of the shoulder musculature and utilizing proper overhead techniques associated with overhead sports and occupations may help reduce the likelihood of developing a rotator cuff tear. Not all tears can be prevented.

**Expectations:** Recovery may take weeks to months for a restoration of pre-injury function. In some cases, surgery is indicated, whereby an individual may be required to refrain from a full return to participation of sport, activity or work for up to 6-9 months.



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