

Rotator Cuff Tendinopathy



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What is it?

The rotator cuff refers to a group of four small muscles which run from the shoulder blade to the top of the arm bone. They support and move the shoulder joint. The rotator cuff muscles attach to the arm bone by tendons. Rotator cuff tendinopathy refers to inflammation and swelling within one or more of these tendons. As people age, it is normal for the rotator cuff tendons to wear and deteriorate, however only a small proportion of people develop pain and weakness that requires treatment.

Symptoms

Rotator cuff tendinopathy results in pain felt in the upper arm. It is usually felt when you try and lift your arm and typically develops gradually. You may also experience stiffness in the shoulder. Pain is also common at night, often radiating down the arm. Pain may worsen over time in intensity and frequency.

What causes it?

- Injury, especially while trying to lift or catch a heavy object
- Overuse, especially after a period of inactivity
- Poor blood supply to an area of the rotator cuff (which occurs with increasing age)
- A fall on an outstretched arm
- A gradual weakening of the tendons of the shoulder

What should you do?

- Ice following participation in sport or aggravating activity (15-20 minutes)
- Don't ignore the problem, it generally won't get better on its own if the cause is not addressed and you continue to aggravate your symptoms
- Physiotherapy – assists in keeping your shoulder strong and flexible and may reduce pain. Your physiotherapist can advise you on activity modification and management
- Painkillers and anti-inflammatory medications can assist to reduce pain and inflammation (Any medication that you take should be discussed with your GP or pharmacist)
- In some cases surgery may be required to repair the rotator cuff if it is completely torn, or to reduce pressure on the irritated tendons.
- In some cases an injection of corticosteroids can help. This would normally be preceded and followed by an intensive period of rehabilitation to address the underlying cause.

Can you prevent it?

- Avoid excessive, repetitive overhead activities
- Strengthen your shoulders and do not try to play or work through the pain
- Your physiotherapist will be able to assess and determine the cause of your rotator cuff tendinopathy and address this during your recovery to prevent re-occurrence, this will often include exercises to improve your posture.

Contact us now

☎ 020 8778 9050

📠 020 8659 1501

✉ enquiries@cppg.co.uk

🌐 www.cppg.co.uk