

# Shoulder Pain 101

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Shoulder pain can stop everything. Driving, writing, using the computer, and even sleeping can become difficult. The shoulder pain you put off today may come back to haunt you in the future. However, it's intriguing to know that one of the most common causes of shoulder pain often preventable.

When shoulder pain starts gradually and for no apparent reason, the most common reason for the pain is directly linked with your posture. On average, there is only a quarter inch of space for the rotator cuff tendons and bursa when you sit in good posture. However, when you slump and then reach or lift something, you put pressure on those sensitive structures. Repeatedly stressing the shoulder while in poor posture will lead to tendinitis or bursitis.

Ask any shoulder surgeon what the most common procedure is for shoulder pain and they will likely tell you it's an S.A.D. (subacromial decompression). This procedure cleans out the bone spurs that have formed in that small space from years of repeated irritation. When irritation has gone on too long, the rotator cuff starts to suffer and may eventually tear. In this case, a surgical rotator cuff repair is sometimes necessary. The rehabilitation after this type of surgery is long and difficult and can limit normal use of your arm for months.

Quite simply, the best way to prevent this type of shoulder pain is to have good posture when using your arm. Strengthening the muscles between the shoulder blades is critical to preventing shoulder pain. It can also help reduce tension on top of the shoulders. Simply squeeze your elbows together behind your back and hold that position five seconds.

To build stamina in those muscles, repeat the exercise one to ten times each hour during the day.

If you are suffering from shoulder pain, act quickly to stop the irritation before you cause more serious or permanent damage. Stop doing anything that causes more pain and apply ice four times per day for two days. Whenever you re-aggravate the pain, apply ice regularly for another two days. Start shoulder blade squeezes as soon as you can do them without more pain. If pain still persists, you may need to get some additional advice from a therapist that specializes in the treatment of shoulder pain. In Minnesota, you don't need a prescription from a doctor to see a physical therapist, you can see one directly. However, **be wary** of the therapist who can't decrease your shoulder pain the very first visit. Treatment of the shoulder joint is very complex. The best shoulder therapists are the ones who primarily treat shoulder cases. A good physical therapist should be able to ease your pain the very first treatment and teach you how to manage your pain on your own.

Apply ice **safely**:

- ✓ A bag of ice cubes can be applied directly on the skin, but a gel pack should not. A thin t-shirt should be placed between the gel pack and your skin.
- ✓ To prevent skin damage, remove the ice or gel pack when your skin **first begins to feel numb**.
- ✓ Anyone with poor circulation or diabetes should be especially careful when icing because the risk of skin damage is much greater.

Quick tips for

## Shoulder Pain Prevention

- ✓ **Sit upright** in your car when reaching for your radio or steering wheel. **Trick:** when you first get in your car, sit up straight, then adjust your rear-view mirror. When you reach for the steering wheel or radio, you should still be able to see out your rear-view mirror. If you can't, you are slumping and may be irritating your shoulder.
- ✓ **Before** reaching up into the cupboard for a plate, **squeeze your shoulder blades together** and stick your chest out slightly.
- ✓ **Avoid** lowering your head down and reaching up at the same time (reaching into the refrigerator while bent forward at the waist). This position **causes pinching** of the rotator cuff tendons and bursa.
- ✓ **Ease up on the bench press!** If your chest muscles are stronger and tighter than your upper back muscles and you don't have shoulder pain yet, just wait a few years...you will.