

Shoulder Tendon and Muscle Injuries

Condition: Shoulder tendon and muscle injuries can occur when any of the four muscle-tendon groups that surround the shoulder become damaged

Background: Two common types are rotator cuff tears (RCTs) and long head of biceps tendon (LHB) tears. These tears typically occur traumatically, through falls, overhead sports, direct force or penetration. However, they can also develop non-traumatically through aging, wear and tear over time, or long-term changes from a previous injury. Another type is a pectoralis major (PM) tear. This occurs in the tendon that attaches the chest muscle to the upper arm bone and is typically associated with indirect trauma, like excessive weightlifting.

Risk Factors: People aged 40 or older are commonly at increased risk. Athletes or people with jobs that require repeated overhead motion are more at risk (i.e. pitchers and swimmers), and pre-existing injury also increases risk.

History and Symptoms: The primary symptoms include pain and weakening in the shoulder.

Physical Exam: The physician will examine the area for muscle tone, bruising or deformity, as well as range of motion and strength. They will also check for symmetry, and examine the opposite shoulder as well as the neck, to rule out any neck or spine issues. Special physical exam maneuvers specifically directed towards the rotator cuff and biceps tendon will be performed.

Diagnostic Process: History and physical examination findings including special testing will be considered and if needed, may be compared to imaging of the shoulder (i.e. x-ray, ultrasound, MRI)

Rehab Management: Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R) physicians well equipped to manage shoulder and muscle injuries due to expertise in neuromuscular anatomy and physiology. PM&R physicians develop rehabilitation strategies to increase range of motion, stabilize and strengthen the shoulder joint, reduce pain, and restore function. These plans are carried out by physical therapists and also include lifestyle modifications. PM&R physicians are able to prescribe the necessary medications to reduce pain and inflammation. If these measures don't help, rehabilitation physicians maintain technical expertise to perform many types of injections to reduce pain and inflammation. The PM&R physician is uniquely positioned to address each of these factors to accurately diagnose and treat shoulder pain while restoring function to each person's everyday life.

Other Resources for Patients and Families: The National Institutes of Health offers resources on [shoulder problems](#) in several languages and can mail print copies to patients and families.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is PM&R?

Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), also known as physiatry, is a primary medical specialty that aims to enhance and restore functional ability and improve quality of life to those with injuries, physical impairments or disabilities affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons. PM&R physicians, known as physiatrists, evaluate and treat the whole body, maximize patients' independence in their daily life and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans to empower patients to achieve their goals. By taking the whole body into account, they can accurately pin-point problems, decrease pain, assist in recovery from devastating injuries and maximize overall outcomes and performance with non-surgical and peri-surgical options. To learn more, visit www.aapmr.org/aboutpmr.

What makes PM&R physicians unique?

PM&R physicians' training focuses not just on treating medical conditions, but on enhancing the patient's performance and quality of life in the context of those medical conditions. They focus not only on one part of the body, but instead on the development of a comprehensive program for putting the pieces of a person's life back together – medically, socially, emotionally and vocationally – after injury or disease. PM&R physicians make and manage medical diagnoses, design a treatment plan and prescribe the therapies that physical therapists or other allied therapists perform or that are carried out by the patients themselves. By providing an appropriate treatment plan, PM&R physicians help patients stay as active as possible at any age. Their broad medical expertise allows them to treat disabling conditions throughout a person's lifetime.

Why see a PM&R physician?

A PM&R physician will thoroughly assess your condition, needs, and expectations and rule out any serious medical illnesses to develop a treatment plan. By understanding your condition and goals, you and your PM&R physician can develop a treatment plan suited to your unique needs.

How do I find a PM&R physician near me?

Visit www.aapmr.org/findapmrphysician or contact your primary care physician for a referral.