

COMMON CONDITIONS OF THE SHOULDER JOINT

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The **shoulder** is one of the largest and most complex joints in the body. It is anatomically designed to allow for an individual to perform a wide range of movements and activities. This versatility, along with the high physical demands placed on a shoulder can also make it vulnerable to breakdown and injury.

Listed below are some of the conditions that commonly cause shoulder problems:

- **Osteoarthritis:** Results from the protective layers of cartilage in the shoulder becoming worn over a period of time, leading to change in the composition of the bone underneath the cartilage. This process may also be related to previous injury/trauma to the shoulder joint.
- **Frozen Shoulder:** Also known as **adhesive capsulitis**, this condition is a painful and persistent stiffness in the shoulder. It is believed to be caused by thickening, swelling, and tightening of the flexible tissue that surrounds the joint. Symptoms can vary greatly and can last anywhere from several months to several years.
- **Rotator Cuff and Soft Tissue Injuries:** The **rotator cuff** is a group of muscles and tendons that provide stability and rotational movements of the shoulder joint in a balanced fashion. Other shoulder muscles are responsible for different ranges of motion of the upper arm (*humerus*) and proper positioning and movement of the shoulder blade (*scapula*) along the ribcage. An injury can occur to any of these muscles which can lead to shoulder problems.
- **Mechanical Conditions:** **Scapular dyskinesis** is a mechanical term used to describe irregular movement of the shoulder blade. It can be an early sign that a shoulder problem may develop, or it may already be accompanied by pain or dysfunction in the shoulder. A mechanical change in shoulder blade movement can be associated with a variety of problems including an internal pinching of soft-tissue structures (**impingement**), irritation of the cushioning bursa (**bursitis**), or a feeling of the shoulder dislocating with certain movements (**instability**).
- **Traumatic Injuries:** Vigorous lifting, pushing, and pulling activities, or a fall onto or blow to the shoulder can result in **ligament sprains** or **muscle strains**. More significant injuries can result in shoulder **dislocations** and **separations**, **rotator cuff** and **soft tissue tears**, **cartilage labral tears**, and **fracture**.



Balanced and stable movements are key to a healthy shoulder. If this does not occur, there is potential for many shoulder problems to exist simultaneously at any given time. For example, an individual may **strain** their shoulder from heavy lifting. The shoulder **strain** may be causing pain, but it can also be accompanied by pain and weakness from **impingement** and **bursitis** that may arise from the irregular movement pattern of the shoulder. Therefore, it is important that a proper evaluation is performed to best guide the treatment of shoulder conditions.



If you suffer from a shoulder problem that is limiting your daily functioning, contact a qualified health professional who can prescribe appropriate therapy, rehabilitation, and self-management strategies specifically for your circumstance. For more information, visit www.nhwc.ca.

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