

Shoulder pain – pain felt in and around the shoulder complex.

Synonyms: Shoulder strain, shoulder sprain.

Symptoms: Shoulder pain can be acute or chronic. It can be sharp, achy, stabbing, burning, or any combination thereof. Shoulder pain can be associated with neck and/or upper trunk pain and dysfunction.

How is it diagnosed?

Shoulder pain is not a diagnosis per se. The shoulder is a ball and socket joint which allows for a large range of motion. The trade-off is that many things can go wrong with it.

Differential diagnoses include the following: rotator cuff strain, shoulder impingement, subscapularis tendonitis, bicipital tendonitis, AC sprain, glenohumeral instability, glenohumeral osteoarthritis, bursitis, frozen shoulder, and labral lesions.

History and physical exam can lead towards a specific diagnosis, but advanced imaging techniques such as MRI, Ultrasound, and MR arthrography are confirmatory.

How is it treated?

Obviously, a tissue specific diagnosis can lead to more effective treatment. However, a tissue specific diagnosis is not always necessary. Tendonitis, bursitis, and mild sprains/strains all follow a similar treatment plan which typically includes: appropriate rest, ice, spinal and shoulder mobilization/manipulation, stretching and strengthening exercises.

Physical medicine modalities may be employed to control pain and inflammation. Examples include electrical stimulation, therapeutic ultrasound, low level laser therapy, and massage.

Alternative treatments.

Medications such as NSAID's, muscle relaxants, opioids, and joint injections. Surgery may be indicated if the nature of your injury is severe.

Prognosis depends on the extent and chronicity of injury. Advanced degenerative changes and/or instability will prolong recovery.

Duration of care: 3 times per week for a total of 4 weeks for a total of 12 visits is initially recommended.

If no clinically significant changes occur within the first 6-8 weeks, a referral for advanced imaging or a second opinion is appropriate.