

Shoulder Pain

Dr. Levi Merritt, DC, CPT, CHC

www.DocLevi.com

What Is Shoulder Pain?

Shoulder pain is discomfort that comes from the shoulder joint or the muscles, tendons, ligaments, and other tissues that help the shoulder move and function. Shoulder pain may develop suddenly after an injury or gradually over time from overuse, repetitive activities, or age-related changes.

Common Symptoms

- Pain in or around the shoulder
- Pain or weakness when lifting, reaching, pushing, or pulling
- Stiffness or difficulty moving the shoulder
- Pain when lying on the affected side
- Clicking, catching, or feelings of instability
- Pain that travels into the upper arm
- Associated neck, upper back, or shoulder blade discomfort
- Pain may be sharp, aching, burning, throbbing, or come and go with activity.

What Causes Shoulder Pain?

- Rotator cuff irritation or tears
- Tendon inflammation (tendinitis)
- Shoulder impingement
- Bursitis
- Arthritis
- Frozen shoulder
- Joint sprains or instability
- Labral injuries
- Pain referred from the neck

Many shoulder problems develop gradually due to repetitive use, poor posture, or age-related wear and tear.

How Is It Diagnosed?

Diagnosis begins with a review of your symptoms, medical history, and a physical examination.

If needed, imaging studies such as X-rays, ultrasound, or MRI may be recommended to help identify the source of your symptoms.

Treatment

Treatment depends on the cause of your shoulder pain and may include:

- Ice therapy

- Therapeutic exercises
- Stretching and mobility exercises
- Manual therapy
- Joint mobilization when appropriate
- Home exercise programs

Additional therapies such as massage, electrical stimulation, laser therapy, or ultrasound may be used to improve comfort and support recovery.

Other Treatment Options

- Over-the-counter pain relievers
- Anti-inflammatory medications
- Cortisone injections
- Referral to an orthopedic specialist when necessary

Surgery is usually reserved for significant tears, instability, advanced arthritis, or conditions that do not improve with conservative treatment.

Prognosis

Most uncomplicated shoulder conditions improve with conservative treatment and rehabilitation. Recovery time varies depending on the specific diagnosis, severity of the injury, and how long symptoms have been present.

Typical Duration of Care

- 2–3 visits per week for 4–6 weeks
- Periodic reassessment and progression of treatment

Estimated Total: Approximately 8–18 visits over 1–3 months. If significant improvement is not seen within 6–8 weeks, additional testing or referral to a specialist may be recommended.

When to Seek Immediate Medical Attention

Seek prompt medical care if you experience:

- Significant weakness after an injury
- A visible deformity of the shoulder
- Inability to move the arm
- Severe swelling or bruising
- Symptoms of infection such as fever, redness, or warmth around the joint