



Understanding the Shoulder

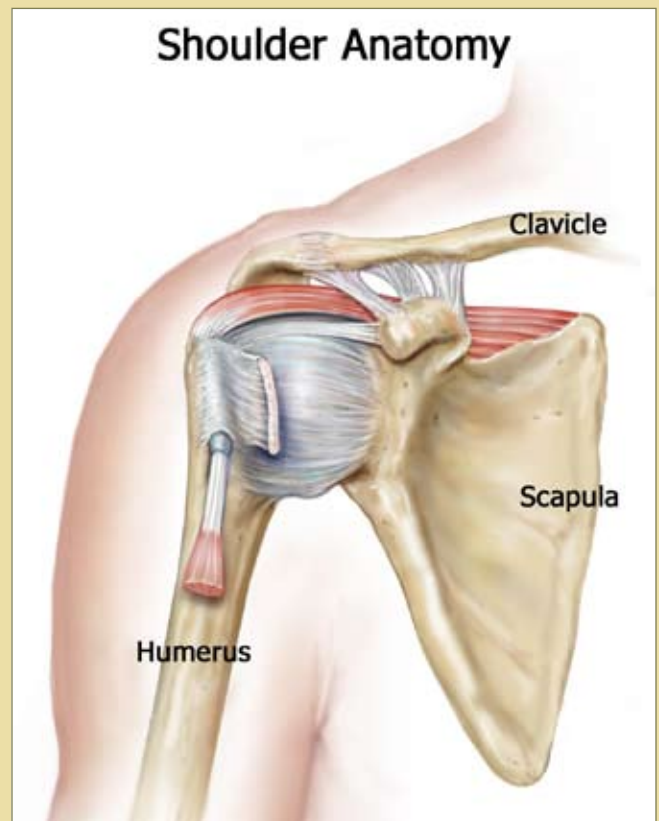
Anatomy

The shoulder is a unique and complex joint. It requires a high degree of flexibility while simultaneously achieving stability in multiple planes of motion. To accomplish this end, the shoulder joint is supported by a combination of bones, ligaments and muscles.

The three bones of the shoulder are the clavicle (collar bone), scapula (shoulder blade) and humerus (upper arm bone). The joints of the shoulder are created at the points where these bones meet. The acromioclavicular (AC) joint is located where the clavicle and acromion join. The glenohumeral joint is formed where the rounded head of the humerus meets the glenoid fossa (a flat portion of the scapula). The point at which these bones meet resembles the way a golf ball sits on a tee. These bones are not sufficient to support the shoulder. Ligamentous and muscular support are necessary to achieve adequate stability.

The bones of the shoulder are surrounded by a joint capsule and ring-like structure called the labrum. The labrum provides a deeper socket in which the humeral head can sit. The joint capsule surrounds these structures and provides ligamentous support to the entire structure.

Finally, the shoulder utilizes the muscles of the rotator cuff to maintain stability of the joint and create motion. The four muscles of the rotator cuff contract and pull the humeral head tight against the glenoid fossa and assist in specific motions.



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Symptoms for a shoulder injury are diverse in presentation and severity. The following should only be thought of as a generalization of the symptoms associated with this injury.

Symptoms

Patients with shoulder injuries can suffer from a variety of symptoms. Most common is pain, instability in certain positions, a sense of weakness performing specific movements and painful clicking and popping of the shoulder. Some patients will have only a few of these symptoms while others may have several.

Diagnosis

In order to determine the cause of your symptoms, your doctor will ask you questions and conduct a physical examination. X-ray is useful in viewing the bony anatomy of the shoulder and can help confirm or eliminate a specific diagnosis. After your doctor has conducted the examination, they may recommend that you undergo more diagnostic tests such as an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan. An MRI allows your physician to clearly see the muscles, tendons, ligaments and bursa of the shoulder. This information helps your Orthopedic Surgeon formulate a treatment plan tailored to your needs.

Treatment

Depending on the severity of the injury, there are several treatment options. Certain exercises may be prescribed to you as well as sessions with a physical therapist. In certain situations, anti-inflammatory medications and/or a steroid injection can decrease the pain and inflammation within the joint. In other cases, surgery is the most effective treatment option. In conjunction with your doctor, you will discuss and agree upon the treatment plan most appropriate for you.

For additional educational materials regarding this topic please visit our website, www.summitortho.com and click on the "Patient Education" quick link at the bottom of the page.

Ice is a convenient and inexpensive treatment option for shoulder pain. Placing a bag of ice directly on the shoulder for twenty minutes prevents swelling and inflammation from accumulating inside the shoulder.

Important Definitions

Sprain: Describes damage to any ligament within the body.

Strain: Describes an injury to a tendon.

Ligaments: Connect bone to bone.

Tendons: Connect muscle to bone.



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