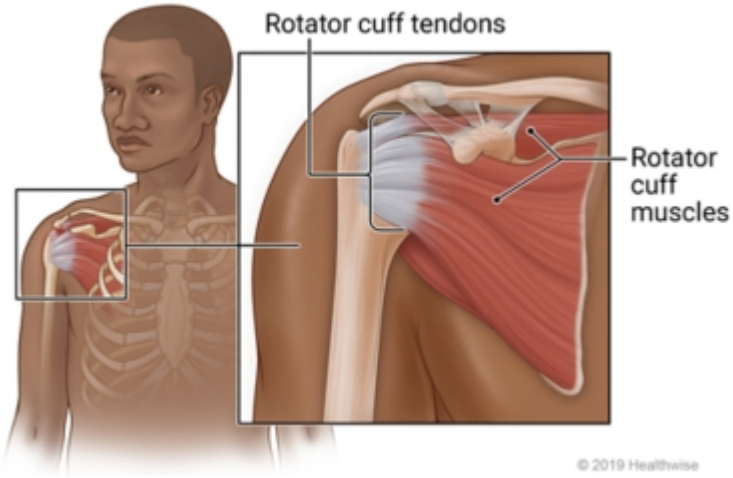
Rotator Cuff Injury: Care Instructions



Overview

The rotator cuff is a group of tendons and muscles around the shoulder that keeps the upper arm bone in place. It keeps the shoulder joint stable and allows you to raise and rotate your arm.

Damage to the rotator cuff can be caused by overuse, a fall, or a direct blow to the shoulder area, which can tear the tendons. Over time, everyday wear can damage the tendons and make injury more likely.

Treatment can depend on the type and amount of damage to the tendons. Your doctor may have you try physical therapy and exercise first. If physical therapy does not help, your doctor may recommend surgery.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Rest your shoulder as much as you can. If your doctor put your arm in a sling or shoulder immobilizer, wear it as directed. Do not take it off before your doctor tells you to. If it is too tight, loosen it.
- Be safe with medicines. Read and follow all instructions on the label.
    - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
    - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- Put ice or a cold pack on your shoulder for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Try to do this every 1 to 2 hours for the next 3 days (when you are awake). Put a thin cloth between the ice pack and your skin.
- After 2 or 3 days, if you don't have swelling, apply heat. Put a warm water bottle, a heating pad set on low, or a warm cloth on your shoulder. Do not go to sleep with a heating pad on your skin. Put a thin cloth between the heating pad and your skin.

- While holding a warm, wet towel on your shoulder, lean forward so your arm hangs freely, and gently swing your arm back and forth like a pendulum. You also can do this standing under a warm shower.
- Do not do anything that makes your pain worse.
- Follow your doctor's advice about whether you need physical therapy.

When should you call for help?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have severe pain.
- You cannot move your shoulder or arm.
- You have tingling or numbness in your arm or hand.
- Your arm or hand is cool or pale.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your pain gets worse.
- You have new or worse swelling in your arm or hand.
- You do not get better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to https://www.healthwise.net/patiented

Enter **D027** in the search box to learn more about **"Rotator Cuff Injury: Care Instructions".**

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