

With wear and tear the shape of bones and elasticity of muscles and tendons change. Joints then fit together less tightly and become injury-prone.

A tendon that becomes compressed under the arch of the shoulder causes inflammation or tendonitis that weakens the rotator cuff. In this state the humerus (upper arm) may ride up and pinch the rotator cuff. Nerve irritation or muscle tightness from misalignment of the cervical spine may also interfere with shoulder function.

“Most joints go up or down, many also from side to side, but the shoulder adds internal and external rotation. A chiropractor has to determine the specific muscle that is injured in order to treat the problem,” says Dr. Ira Shapiro, a chiropractor in Old Bridge NJ, who served as a team chiropractor for the U.S. Olympic Team during the 2006 Winter Olympic Games.

Shapiro, a Diplomate American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians®, examines muscles by gently palpating around the shoulder looking for points of pain. He also tests muscle strength and range of motion.

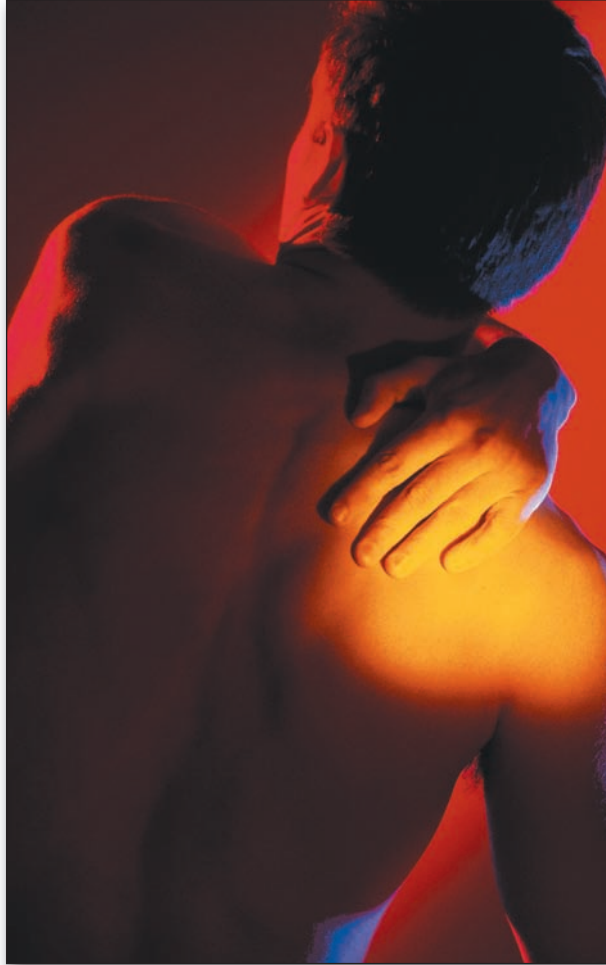
REGAINING MOBILITY

Chiropractic offers many treatments to restore rotator cuff stability, promote healing, and improve muscle flexibility, balance and strength.

Muscle imbalances are corrected using a variety of modalities or soft tissue massage. Controlled passive motion helps prevent the formation of adhesions. Resistance exercises stimulate a stronger repair and assist in remodeling. There are exercises to build strength and extend range of motion.

Shapiro advises icing during the acute inflammatory stage to minimize swelling and start healing. He then introduces stretching and slowly adds specific

exercises. “Athletes can be impatient to get back to regular workout routines. I stress rehabilitating the area before exercising the area. When exercise is appropriate, we first strengthen stabilizing muscles, and then exercise



large muscles.”

He reiterates, “A torn or injured rotator cuff does not heal in a day. We look for desired results in the short term to be sure things are moving in the right direction.”

BACK TO THE PROBLEM

Shapiro notes that chiropractors look at the relationships between the spinal region and rotator cuff, making adjustments when, and if, needed. “We also work on the surrounding soft tissue that attaches to the spine,” he says.

The overall goal, according to Gross, is to protect and strengthen the region around the injury. “With a torn rotator cuff, the integrity of tissue cannot be compromised. Chiropractic adjustment is directed to regions around the injured area.”

Steven M. Horwitz DC, a certified Chiropractic Sports Physician with offices in Silver Spring and Rockville MD, says, “I never just treat rotator cuff pain. If I find adhesions there, I know that there are problems elsewhere. Part of the puzzle is missing. I talk to patients about ergonomics, posture, and other mechanical deficiencies.”

He cautions, “Recovery is a step-by-step process of healing and rebuilding. It’s a matter of doing the right exercises at the right time with the patient.”

ONGOING CARE

Gross says, “I urge patients who have had surgery to play an active role in their own therapy, starting with passive rehabilitation and slowly getting into active rehabilitation.”

“My goal is to avoid a recurrence of the rotator cuff problem,” says Horwitz. “That’s one reason for on-going chiropractic care. The absence of pain is not an indication that our work is done. Someone can have serious deficiencies without any symptoms at all. I teach preventive exercise.”

“It’s very important for athletes - especially during competitive years - to keep up with a rehabilitative protocol so they can return to regular activity without risk of reinjury,” says Shapiro. “Pain is the last thing to come about when there is an injury. By exercising to maintain flexibility and visiting the chiropractor regularly to treat emerging problems before they present pain, patients can prevent rotator cuff injury.”