

# What is rotator cuff repair?

Rotator cuff tears are one of the most frequent causes of shoulder pain. The rotator cuff is a group of muscles and tendons that surround the “ball” (head of the humerus bone) in the shoulder. The muscles included are the supraspinatus, the infraspinatus, the subscapularis and the teres minor. Together, these muscles work to lift and rotate the shoulder. Injuries to the rotator cuff most often involve the supraspinatus muscle, although multiple parts of the cuff can be involved.

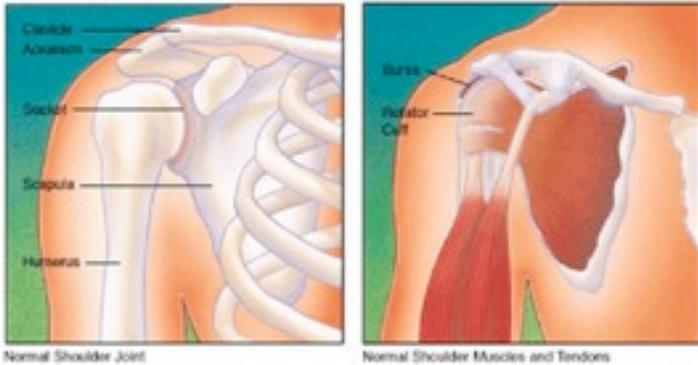


Figure 1: Normal anatomy of the shoulder

Symptoms of a rotator cuff tear may include:

- Pain when lifting or lowering the arm
- Thinning of the muscles about the shoulder
- Weakness when lifting or rotating the arm
- Crackling sensation when moving the joint

Rotator cuff tears may result from a single traumatic injury or repetitive motion in the joint. The majority of these injuries involve the overuse of these muscles and tendons over a period of several years. Diagnosis of a rotator cuff tear involves a physical examination to check range of motion, tenderness and strength, as well as an X-ray or MRI. Tears of the rotator cuff are sometimes correlated with fracture or shoulder dislocation.

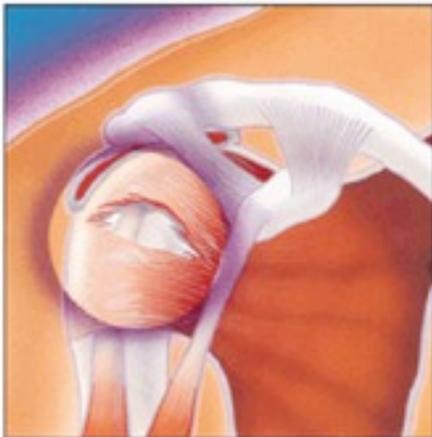


Figure 2: Rotator cuff tear

Non-surgical treatments typically include strengthening exercises to increase range of motion, anti-inflammatory medication, steroid injection as well as rest and activity modification. Surgical treatment is recommended for injuries to the rotator cuff that do not respond to non-surgical methods and involve weakness, loss of function, and pain. The nature of the injury will determine the type of surgery, although most tears can be repaired arthroscopically. Partial tears will involve a trimming or smoothing procedure called “debridement,” while full tears will involve suturing the two sides of the tendon back together. Tendons torn away from their insertion onto the upper arm bone (humerus) will need to be reattached.