

THE BASICS 540.985.0500

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» Shoulder Pain While Swimming?



Swimming can be considered as a form of relaxation, an exercise, or even a competitive sport. Most health professionals consider swimming to be an excellent cardiovascular exercise to strengthen the heart. Some people learn to swim by taking lessons, while others simply teach themselves by practicing and "catching on" to the idea and technique. Whatever your purpose, swimming is a great way to have fun.

As strange as it sounds, excessive swimming (or overuse of your shoulder) can cause shoulder pain.

Since swimming requires repetitive motion, it can cause excessive strain on the muscles and ligaments that support the shoulder. A swimmer's shoulder, or rotator cuff tendonitis, is a repetitive stress injury wherein tendons in the shoulder have been damaged. This form of tendonitis is often referred to as "swimmer's shoulder" because it often affects swimmers. The body mechanics of the freestyle stroke of a swimmer can cause inflammation of the shoulder tendons during the pull through and recovery phases of the stroke.

Up to 65% of competitive swimmers experience a problem with their shoulder, especially when they swim as much as 6 to 8 miles per day or more. A high incidence of overuse syndromes and biomechanical abnormalities are not uncommon, given the fact that the shoulder is a complex and extremely mobile joint.

» Signs of a Swimmer's Shoulder

A professional swimmer is susceptible to shoulder pain. Some non-professional swimmers can also acquire it due to body mechanics and the motion of swimming. Pain in the front or back of the shoulder (especially when raising the arm overhead) is the most common sign of swimmer's shoulder. The pain increases with repetitive overhead reaching movements, like those involved in swimming. The more a person swims, the worse the pain can become.

Other signs of a swimmer's shoulder include a forward shoulder slouch while seated, shoulder pain during freestyle swimming, a decrease in shoulder range of motion, decreased strength compared to the other shoulder and increased joint laxity. As soon as the pain occurs, one should immediately seek advice from a physician or physical therapist to prevent permanent damage. A doctor and/or physical therapist is best suited to confirm and diagnose swimmer's shoulder.

It is important to maintain correct biomechanics of your shoulder joint before and after swimming. Swimming is a fun and healthy activity, but all swimmers should self-monitor to prevent injuries.



» Prevention of Shoulder Pain

Although swimmer's shoulder seems like a complicated condition, it can be treated and possibly prevented. The following are some of the best ways to treat swimmer's shoulder:

1. Rest for a while. No other treatment is better than allowing the shoulder to rest.
2. Ice the shoulder after the activity. This will help decrease inflammation around the tendons in the shoulder.
3. Reduction of training. As your body recovers, you can increase the intensity of exercise.
4. Modify stroke mechanics when swimming. Emphasize proper technique with each stroke and eliminate the component that is causing the pain.
5. Taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) after consulting with your physician.

The length of the treatment and recovery time depends on several factors, which is exactly where your physical therapist helps you.

A physical therapist will not only determine the cause of the problem but also help you choose the best treatment option.

As your physical therapists, we can help develop a strategy to minimize or eliminate shoulder pain. Contact us today and we will be more than happy to assist if you have been diagnosed with shoulder pain, or have symptoms of swimmer's shoulder.



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I will recommend anyone with Physical Therapy needs to Back to Basics. Thanks for everything. Kelli J.

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