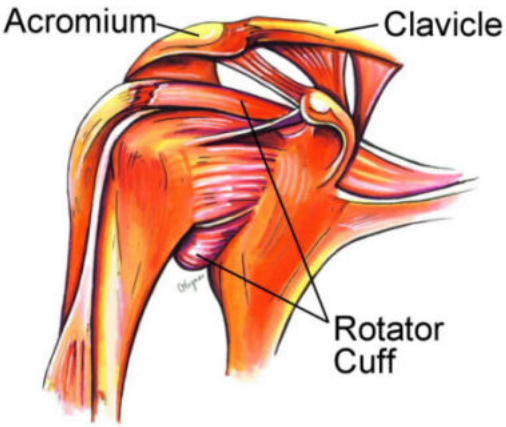
Rotator Cuff Injury

The rotator cuff is the collective set of muscles and tendons that make up the stabilizing unit of your shoulder. This unit holds in the ball of the *humerus* (upper arm bone) in the socket of the *scapula* (shoulder blade). Injuries to this stabilizing unit most commonly come from sports or activities that cause the arm to be moved repeatedly over the head. Examples of this include throwing, weight lifting, swimming, racquet sports, or an injury such as falling on your arm. Chronic (longstanding) irritation of this unit can cause *inflammation* (soreness), bursitis, and eventual damage to the tendons to the point of *rupture* (tear). An *acute* (sudden) injury of the rotator cuff can result in a partial or complete tear. You may need surgery with complete tears. Small or partial rotator cuff tears may be treated conservatively with temporary immobilization, exercises and rest. Physical therapy may be needed.



HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Apply ice to the injury for 15 to 20 minutes 3 to 4 times per day for the first 2 days. Put the ice in a plastic bag and place a towel between the bag of ice and your skin.
- If you have a shoulder immobilizer (sling and straps), do not remove it until you see a caregiver for a follow-up examination. If you need to remove it to clean yourself, move your arm as little as possible.
- You may want to sleep on several pillows or in a recliner at night to lessen swelling and pain.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Do simple hand squeezing exercises with a soft rubber ball to decrease hand swelling.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Pain in your shoulder increases or new pain or numbness develops in your arm, hand, or fingers.
- Your hand or fingers are colder than your other hand.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your arm, hand, or fingers are numb or tingling.
- Your arm, hand, or fingers are increasingly swollen and painful, or turn white or blue.

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