



WELCOME TO THE STEADMAN | HAWKINS CLINIC

What is the rotator cuff?

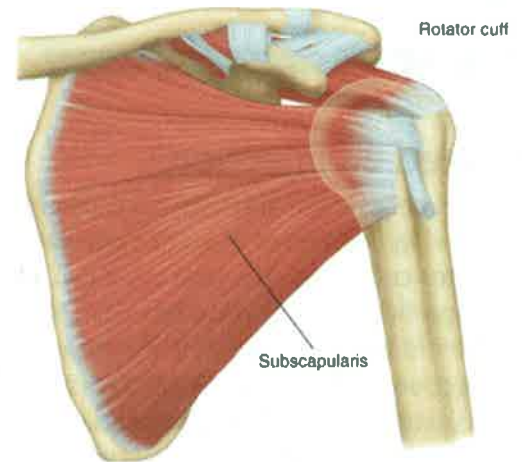
The shoulder is a complex joint, allowing for the widest degree of freedom compared to any other joint in our body. It's mainly composed of the humeral head and the glenoid, which resemble a golf-ball sitting on a tee, and is held together primarily by the rotator cuff. The rotator cuff is a group of four muscles that surround the glenohumeral joint, called the Subscapularis, Supraspinatus, Infraspinatus, and Teres Minor (abbreviated SITS muscles). They cannot be seen or felt on the outside of the body, as they sit under the deltoid. The primary job of the rotator cuff is to hold the humeral head (golf-ball) centered on the tee (glenoid). This allows for the deltoid to properly move the arm in space.

How did I get a tear?

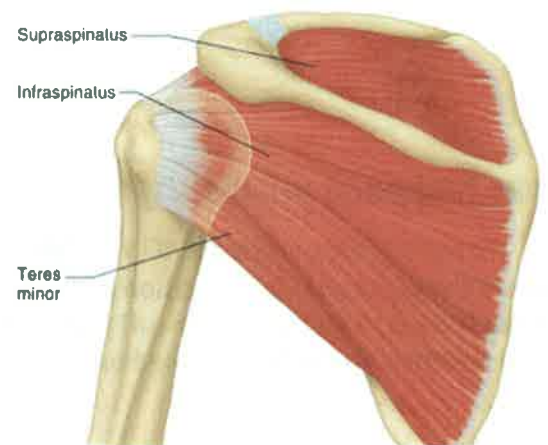
Although some tears happen as a direct result from trauma, the vast majority of tears that we see are a result of degeneration of the tissues due to aging or overuse. Although there can be an event that causes the shoulder to become painful, the rotator cuff tear has been present for a long time, and the event that has caused shoulder pain was the "straw that broke the camel's back," figuratively speaking.

Do I need to have surgery?

Most patients actually do not need surgery. Although rotator cuff repair surgery is very common (mostly due to how common rotator cuff tears are), physical therapy is an extremely effective means of treating this ailment. Subconsciously, we can overcompensate the muscles that are injured, which can make the tear and pain worse. Physical therapy helps us to retrain our bodies to use other muscles to mobilize our shoulders that help offload the torn rotator cuff and help the pain to resolve. Generally, only after physical therapy and other nonoperative modalities have not produced satisfactory results is surgery considered.



Miller MD, Thompson SR. 2020. *DeLee, Drez, and Miller's Orthopaedic Sports Medicine, 5th Edition*. Elsevier, Inc.



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Do I need an injection?

Not necessarily, although corticosteroid injections can be an effective means of quickly alleviating the pain from rotator cuff tears. The pain relief can allow patients to better participate in physical therapy. Although 1-2 corticosteroid injections can help significantly, requiring more injections with steroids is not typically advised because sustained exposure to steroids can actually diminish the healing capacity for rotator cuff tears.



What happens with surgery?

To put it simply, surgeons will visualize the tear with a camera through a poke-hole incision in the shoulder, and then use sutures to tie the rotator cuff tear back to its original insertion on the bone of the humeral head.

If I have surgery, how long of a recovery does it typically take?

Although variable as well, rotator cuff tears typically take a full 6-months to recover. This allows healing of the rotator cuff in the correct area of repair, then regaining of motion of the shoulder followed by strengthening of the shoulder back to its original status prior to surgery, all through postoperative physical therapy.

