



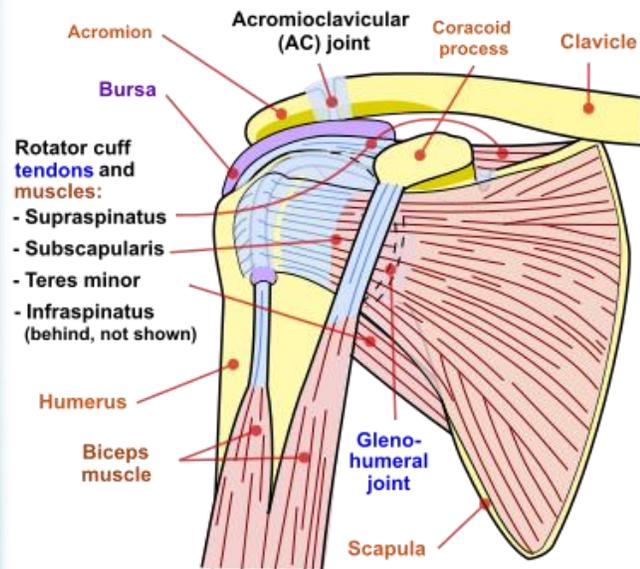
QUEENSLAND
PHYSIOTHERAPY

Shoulder Bursitis and Tendinopathy

What is it?

Bursitis is a common finding in people with shoulder pain, especially if you've had an ultrasound. The term means inflammation of the bursa, which is a fluid-filled structure that essentially acts as a cushion between the tendons and bones of your shoulder. A bursa may become inflamed if it is made to absorb excess compression or friction during movement – usually secondary to poor muscle strength or control of movement. It is very unusual for bursitis to occur without an underlying muscular cause.

Tendinopathy refers to an overload of a tendon. In the shoulder, this usually involves the tendons of your rotator cuff (RC) muscles. This overload may occur due to an increase in activity, imbalances in muscle strength or control, or from compressive forces on the tendon. As your RC is largely responsible for controlling the movement of your shoulder joint, when RC tendinopathy occurs, there is less strength in the muscles, and therefore less control with movement. This can perpetuate the tendinopathy and/or bursitis and begin a negative cycle of disuse, weakness and pain.



Diagnosis

Shoulder bursitis and tendinopathy are usually diagnosed using a combination of subjective information from you, physical tests (movement and strength) and, if necessary, imaging (usually ultrasound).

Ultrasound is often routine in the diagnosis of shoulder pain; however, it is important to remember that imaging of the anatomy does not show pain, tightness or muscle function and can often be misleading with its results. A 2011 study of '*asymptomatic* males' reports that ultrasonography revealed abnormalities in 96% of the group – including evidence of bursitis in 78%, tendinopathy in 39% and arthritis in 65% - all of these subjects reported no pain or symptoms at all! This highlights that ultrasound (and other types of scans) can show structural abnormalities and changes in shoulders that are perfectly healthy.

Sometimes scan results aren't as scary as they seem!

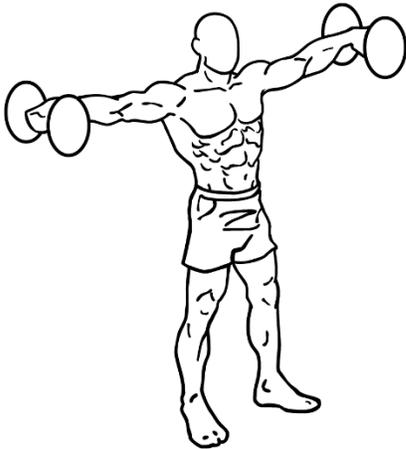
Treatment

Treatment of RC tendinopathy and bursitis is aimed at:

- Reducing pain
- Restoring range of motion
- Improving strength and overall function
- Preventing persistent/recurring pain

This can be achieved using a variety of different strategies and your management plan should be tailored to you as an individual. These may include:

- **Advice & Education** – a very powerful treatment option. Educating you about your condition in a way that is relevant to your normal activities of daily living helps empower you and teaches you ways of self-managing your condition.
- **Exercise** – all tendinopathy is due to tendons being put under more load than they can handle, so exercises that progressively load the shoulder are vital for overall improvement. This begins with a load that your shoulder can handle, and will gradually increase as you get stronger.
- **Manual Therapy** – soft tissue massage, joint mobilisation, dry needling, assisted movements and other ‘hands-on’ techniques can often be useful in relieving pain or increasing movement.
- **Taping** – various taping techniques may help facilitate movement by altering or reducing the load on the shoulder.
- **Other pain relief** – electrotherapy (such as TENS or ultrasound), paracetamol or other pharmaceutical pain relief can reduce pain, and in turn, this may allow you to use your shoulder more normally and restore some normal function.



What should you do?

Stay Active!

Your shoulder does not need complete rest – often this just makes it harder to regain full movement and strength. Whenever possible you should aim to continue work as normal, continue using your arm as normal, and maintain a regular exercise routine. Initially, you may need to reduce the load on your shoulder (e.g. lighter exercises, more frequent breaks) but don't try to completely avoid pain. Remember that pain does NOT mean damage!

Find Coping Strategies

Having coping strategies is an important way to feel in control of your shoulder pain. Studies have shown that people with *active* strategies (i.e. things that they can actively do themselves) recover better than those who rely on *passive* strategies (e.g. heat, massage, medication, injections). Your physio can help you find stretches, movements and exercises that you can use to actively improve your condition and feel more in control of your pain.

Seek Treatment

Research has shown that physiotherapy provides more superior results than steroid injections, ‘wait-and-see’ treatments and often even surgery. At Queensland Physio we will provide you with advice and education that is specific and relevant to you as an individual. We will teach you strategies to actively manage your pain and appropriately load your shoulder, and work with you in developing a treatment plan that is tailored at getting you back to doing what you love as soon as possible.

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