



Working together to achieve the healthiest life possible for everyone in Ayrshire and Arran

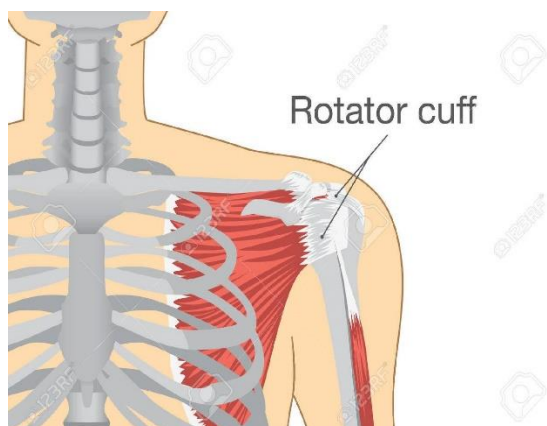
1 – Weak and painful; Rotator Cuff Related Shoulder Pain (RCRSP)

Weak and painful shoulders are related to problems with the rotator cuff tendons in the shoulder. This “umbrella” term includes a range of conditions which involve the bursae (small sacs of fluid present in all shoulders) and the tendons of the rotator cuff. The tendons of the rotator cuff can be inflamed, overloaded, and can also present with tears or develop calcium deposits. This has traditionally been called tendonitis but the more recent term of this condition is tendinopathy.

Very often, people do not have any injury to cause their pain. Sometimes you may just have been doing more than your shoulder is used to doing (overloading) or your muscles may be weaker and underused, all of which can lead to pain and loss of movement.

However lifestyle factors such as being overweight, unfit or smoking have all been linked to tendon problems and shoulder pain.

What is the Rotator Cuff?



4 Muscles

Supraspinatus
Infraspinatus
Teres Minor
Subscapularis

These muscles and their tendons work as a team to support the shoulder and help the joint move normally

The Rotator Cuff is an extremely hard working muscle group. It is a group of 4 muscles, and as the name suggests they rotate the arm inwards and outwards as well as helping to lift your arm away from your side.

The rotator cuff muscles attach to the head of the humerus (arm bone) by their tendons, and work as a unit known as a 'cuff'. They all help to support the shoulder joint and are especially important in supporting the shoulder when your arm is away from your side. When these muscles and tendons are not working effectively then the normal mechanics of the shoulder is affected and pain can be a result.

How common is Rotator-Cuff Related Shoulder Pain?

Having a weak and painful shoulder is very common!

Usually symptoms appear in individuals between the ages of 35-75, but it can occur at any age

Research suggests that approximately 1 in 5 people will experience Rotator-Cuff Related Shoulder Pain symptoms at some point in their lives.

Symptoms can include

- Shoulder pain which can radiate down the arm (Often people feel pain in their upper arm only)
- People often report pain or aching at night usually when lying on their sore arm
- Pain is worse on overhead movements
- You may have a catching feeling as you lift your arm
- You would **not** normally expect to have tingling or numbness in the arm related to your shoulder problem.

Rotator Cuff Tears

It is very common to develop tears in these tendons as you age. Often we can have small tears in the tendon with no pain. As we age we expect that we may get grey hair and wrinkles on the outside, however we often have normal age related changes on the inside. Therefore tears in these tendons with no history of injury do not necessarily mean tears seen on scans are the source of your pain.

An analogy is a small hole in a picnic blanket. It does not stop you using the blanket for your picnic or to keep you warm! However if pain develops, it is usually because the Rotator Cuff is weaker and not supporting the shoulder as effectively as it should. These tears are called non traumatic tears.

The amount of pain you feel does not necessarily match with the size of a tear, often small tears can be very painful, and larger tears may not cause any significant pain or problem.

However if you have had an injury, associated with a sudden loss of movement it is important that you seek health care advice to determine the extent of the injury. These are called traumatic tears.

Traumatic Rotator Cuff Tears

Following trauma, sometimes you can tear the tendons of the Rotator Cuff muscles. This is likely to cause significant pain with loss of movement. You may find you are unable to lift your arm or move it in the way you could before.

Usually a rotator cuff tear is diagnosed from symptoms and history, but imaging such as X-Rays, Ultrasound and MRI can be useful in certain situations.

Regardless of whether the tears are caused by trauma or injury, the current research has shown that rehabilitation exercises can be equally effective in treating these injuries compared to surgery. Shoulder surgery should only be considered when conservative measures have failed to restore function.