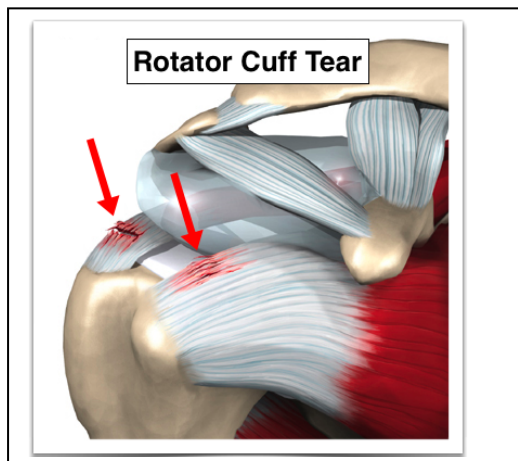


Rotator cuff strain



What is it?

The rotator cuff refers to a group of four small muscles which run from the shoulder blade to the top of the arm bone. They act to both support and move the shoulder joint. A rotator cuff strain refers to a strain or tears in one or more of these muscles.

How does it happen?

A rotator cuff muscle may be strained when it is forcibly contracted or overstretched. This can occur in any activity which requires movement of the shoulder.

How does it feel?

A tear of a rotator cuff muscle is usually felt as sudden pain or a 'twinge' felt in the shoulder area. In minor tears you may be able to continue participating with minimal hindrance. However, as the muscle cools down following participation the pain may gradually worsen as bleeding and swelling around the injured muscle takes place. In more severe tears, pain may be exaggerated such that you are unable to continue participating immediately following injury. In these cases the shoulder may also feel weak.

What should you do?

If you have or suspect you have a rotator cuff strain, it is advised you cease participating and begin initial treatment. The most important time in the treatment of a rotator cuff strain is the first 24–48 hours. This is when bleeding and swelling around the injured muscle is most active. Although swelling is a necessary step in the healing process, too much can delay healing and cause further tissue damage. To control the amount of swelling and limit the degree of damage, the injured rotator cuff muscle should be rested and iced. Rest involves ceasing to participate and limiting the use of the injured arm. Icing involves applying crushed ice in a towel or cloth to the injured site for 15–20 minutes every 1–2 hours. You should continue this until you consult a North City Physiotherapist. This should be undertaken as soon as possible.

What shouldn't you do?

In the first few days following rotator cuff strain you shouldn't undertake activities which increase blood flow to the injured muscle. These include hot showers, shoulder stretching, heat rubs, massage, the consumption of alcohol and excessive use of the arm. These can prolong muscle bleeding and exaggerate swelling resulting in further pain and an extended recovery.

Could there be any long-term effects?

Most rotator cuff strains heal without complication within a matter of weeks. However, a proportion of injuries can result in longer-term effects, depending on the severity of the injury and the extent of damage. For example, when a rotator cuff muscle is completely torn surgery may be required to repair the muscle. To recover from surgery and enable the muscle to fully heal, a prolonged recovery may be required. Similarly, in minor tears recovery may be prolonged if the tear is not appropriately managed. This may result in a tight, weak rotator cuff muscle which is prone to reinjury with return to participation.

What NORTH CITY PHYSIO CAN DO TO HELP:

The assistance of a North City Physiotherapist is important in the treatment of a rotator cuff strain. Initially, they can assist in determining the exact tissue/s damaged and the extent of this damage. This may require the use of imaging techniques such as ultrasound to aid in the diagnosis. From this, a determination of how long the injury is expected to take to heal can be provided and an appropriate management plan developed. The latter may involve activity modification, the use of soft tissue treatment such as massage and stretching, and the progression through a series of specific strengthening exercises. These exercises will facilitate your return to participation, help prevent reinjury and reduce the likelihood of developing longer-term effects.

PLEASE CONSULT A NORTH CITY PHYSIOTHERAPIST AT ONE OF OUR CLINICS