

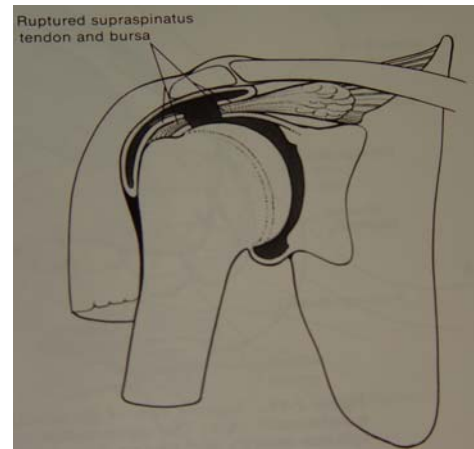
ROTATOR CUFF TEARS

What is wrong with my shoulder?

The rotator cuff is made of four muscles. These four muscles blend together and help hold your upper arm bone (humerus) in your shoulder socket (glenoid). The rotator cuff helps you lift your arm over your head. Sometimes the rotator cuff muscles, which hold the ball in the socket, can become damaged from injury or wear-and-tear. Overtime, the repetitive stress on the rotator cuff can cause a rotator cuff tear. A hole is worn into the rotator cuff, the same way you can wear a hole into your jeans.

What causes a rotator cuff tear?

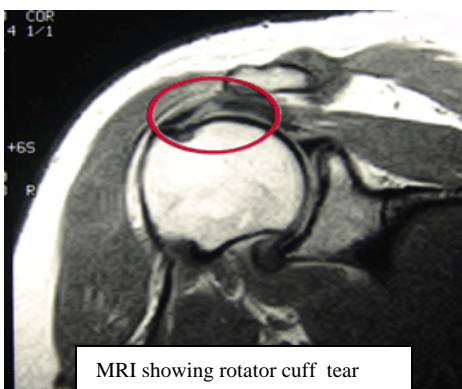
Typically the rotator cuff wears out over time from overuse. For other people, a rotator cuff tear occurs after a fall or an accident. This type of injury forcefully tears the muscle away from the bone. The risk of tearing your rotator cuff after a fall increases with increasing age, as does the incidence of rotator cuff tears in general. Full thickness rotator cuff tears are rare in people under the age of forty.



How is a rotator cuff tear diagnosed?

Patients with rotator cuff tears almost always have weakness in the shoulder, because the cuff is no longer attached properly to the bone. Sometimes people can have weakness without a cuff tear due to pain. Patients will usually complain

of not being able to sleep on the injured shoulder. Occasionally patients will feel a catching sensation in their shoulder. The best way to determine if you have a rotator cuff tear is with a special test called an MRI. The MRI can also give your doctor clues as to how big the tear is, and how long it has been present.

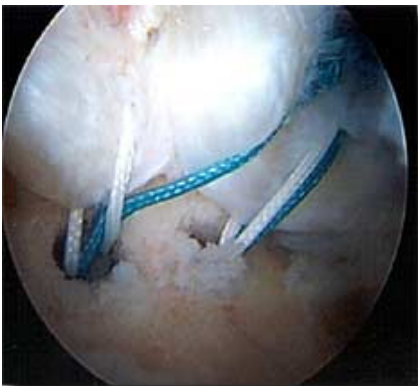


How are rotator cuff tears treatment?

Cortisone shots and physical therapy can sometimes make the shoulder feel better, but this is often temporary. The rotator cuff, once it is torn, has no potential to heal itself, and will remain torn unless it is surgically fixed. There are some patients who opt not to have surgery despite having a rotator cuff tear. If you are very elderly, have severe or significant medical problems that make surgery very risky for you, you and your surgeon may decide against surgery at this time. There are also some patients whose tears are so large and so chronic that they may not be surgically repairable. For these patients, other types of surgery or non-operative management may be most appropriate

What happens if I need surgery?

The treatment of full thickness rotator cuff tears is almost always surgical. The surgery is designed to reattach the torn tendon directly down to bone and close the defect. This is usually combined with a decompression, which allows more space for the rotator cuff. The rotator cuff repair can be performed in a variety of ways. How your cuff tear is repaired will depend on the size and age of your tear, as well as your surgeon's preference. The cuff can be repaired through three basic types of incisions: arthroscopic portals, a mini-open incision, or a



Arthroscopic rotator cuff repair using suture anchors

formal open repair. The tendon must be reattached to bone, and this can be done with suture anchors or with bone tunnels. No matter which type of incision your surgeon chooses, the healing process of cuff to bone is the same. Although the length of rehab may vary from 3 to 6 months, the progression is the same for all patients.