

SHOULDER INSTABILITY

What is wrong with my shoulder?

The shoulder (glenohumeral) joint is a ball and socket joint. The “ball” is the rounded portion of the humerus and the “socket” is the dish-shaped outer edge of the scapula called the glenoid. Shoulder instability occurs when the “ball” feels like it might slip out of the “socket”. For some patients, this shoulder slipping is painful.

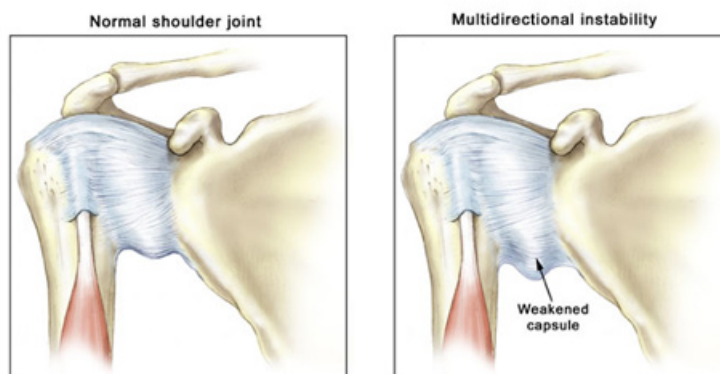
Is shoulder instability the same as shoulder dislocation?

No. When your shoulder goes completely out of place, it's called "dislocation." The shoulder ligaments are torn and can't keep the joint in place. Instability is a spectrum of looseness or laxity in the joint. The signs of dislocation and instability might seem the same to you--weakness and pain. However, people who dislocate their shoulders can usually feel that the ball is out of the socket.

What causes shoulder instability?

The shoulder joint is the most mobile joint in the body, and you need all of the muscles, ligaments, and tendons working properly to maintain stability. The shoulder becomes unstable if the ligaments tear, the muscles become weak or torn, or if the cartilage (labrum) tears. Athletes who compete in sports that involve overhead activities may have a loose shoulder or instability. These athletes, such as volleyball players, swimmers, and baseball pitchers, stretch out the shoulder capsule and ligaments, and may develop chronic shoulder instability. Patients with some connective tissue disorders may also have loose shoulder joints. In patients who have a condition that causes joint laxity, or double-jointedness, their joints may be too loose throughout their body. This can lead to

instability.



shoulder

How is shoulder instability diagnosed?

Shoulder instability is usually diagnosed by the history and physical examination. Often times, X-rays and MRI's are negative. On examination, your doctor may be able to feel the laxity (looseness) of the shoulder joint. Some patients with shoulder instability often complain of an uncomfortable sensation that their shoulder may be about to slide out of place. This is called apprehension. Other patients with this problem mainly experience pain.

How is shoulder instability treated?

Treatment of shoulder instability almost always starts with physical therapy or rehab. The goal is to strengthen your shoulder muscles which will help make the shoulder more stable. When pain is present, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDS) such as ibuprofen or aleve may help.

What happens if I need surgery?

If non-operative treatment such as physical therapy fails, you may elect to have surgery. The type of surgery you have depends on what kind of shoulder instability you have. If your shoulder capsule and ligaments are stretched out, surgery can be done to tighten your shoulder. This is called a capsular plication and can be done arthroscopically through small incisions. Traditionally this surgery was done through one large incision and was called a capsular shift. Arthroscopic capsular plication is outpatient surgery. Recovery is about 3-6 months.