thewhitehouse
physiotherapy and sports injury clinics

SHOULDER PAIN

The Shoulder is a common source of pain and in our bodies. Problems can result from repetitive tasks, poor postures, sporting injuries and degeneration in the joint. There are a number of structures in the shoulder which may be the cause of pain; however the source of pain is sometimes referred from other regions, especially the neck. Physiotherapy can be extremely beneficial in diagnosing and treating shoulder pain.

Common causes of shoulder pain:

Tendons

The tendons of the rotator cuff muscles form a strong supportive structure around the shoulder joint. These tendons can become damaged with repetitive tasks, playing sport and doing heavy lifting, among other things. When the tendons are damaged it is termed tendinosis.

Pain from this condition is often felt when performing specific movements, such as reaching up high, putting a jacket or belt on or performing DIY. If the damaged tendons are inflamed, they may compress on the bone at the top of the shoulder joint on certain movements; this is called impingement.

Bursa

Bursae are found all over the body. They are fluid filled sacks that protect structures from rubbing against the bone. The bursae in the shoulder can be irritated with repetitive actions. This can lead to impingement. You may experience problems with lying on the affected side at night, reaching the arm in certain directions, and in severe cases it may even cause pain when the arm is resting by your side.

Frozen Shoulder

The capsule that surrounds the shoulder joint is made up of strong fibrous tissue. For no apparent reason it can contract and thicken. This leads to pain and restricted movement. Frozen shoulder is more common in diabetics and women aged 40-60.

There are 3 main stages to frozen shoulder:

1. Painful stage- gradually increasing pain
2. Frozen stage- increasing stiffness, with the pain gradually lessening
3. Thawing stage- the stiffness gradually eases

These phases can last between 18-24 months. Most people make a full recovery.

Arthritis

Arthritis can develop in the joint where the collar bone meets the shoulder blade- the acromioclavicular joint. It can result in a bony lump on top of the joint. Signs of arthritis are pain at the end of shoulder movements, especially when reaching up. It can also lead to impingement (as described above) in the tissues under this joint. Arthritis can also affect the ball and socket joint, however this is not as common.

Referred Pain

Pain in the shoulder region can be referred from structures in a different body region. The nerves, muscles, joints & ligaments in the neck can refer pain into the shoulder. You may feel an ache in the arm or shoulder blade. Pins and needles can develop in the hand and arm. Muscle tightness resulting from repetitive movements and sustained postures can lead to pain and stiffness in the shoulder.

Self help options

- Pain relief- They can help ease the pain, and allow your muscles to relax. Speak to your GP or pharmacist about what is best to take
- Movement- try to keep the arm moving within your tolerance of pain. Gentle movement is important, but do not overstretch. See our Exercises for Shoulder pain sheet for more information
- Heat or cold- These can help with pain relief and relaxing muscle tension. Speak to your physiotherapist about what is the best option for you
- Posture- Look after you posture; try not to slouch when sitting and try to relax
- Irritating movements- Try to avoid activities, movements and positions that may be irritating your symptoms
- Contact your physiotherapist for advice and treatment

How physiotherapy can help

After an initial consultation your physiotherapist will be able to identify the source of your shoulder pain, and explain the reasons behind why the symptoms have developed. They will help with the rehabilitation of your problem by applying a variety of treatment techniques, giving advice on how you use your shoulder and prescribing exercises to help with the recovery.

Treatment may include:

- Exercises to get your arm moving more efficiently
- Manual therapy techniques such as massage and gentle manipulation to release the joint and surrounding tissues
- Ultrasound & Acupuncture
- Advice on activity and sport
- Postural advice at home and at work
- Relaxation techniques to help reduce muscle tension

Further information:

www.whitehouse-clinic.co.uk

www.csp.org.uk

www.shoulderdoc.co.uk