

**Shoulder Tendinitis  
Common Questions  
Dr. Stetson**

**Shoulder Tendinitis**

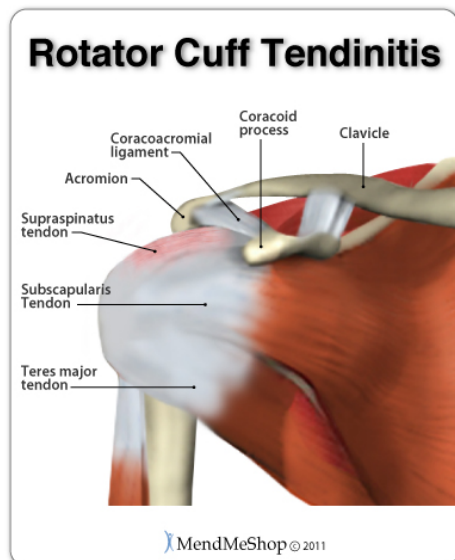
**Common Questions**



**More information can be found on  
Dr. Stetson's website at [www.sportsmedicinedr.com](http://www.sportsmedicinedr.com)**

**What is shoulder tendinitis?**

Shoulder tendinitis is an inflammation or irritation of the tendons that surround the shoulder joint. This can include the rotator cuff tendons which is called rotator cuff tendinitis or it can involve the biceps tendon which is called biceps tendinitis. Pain on the side or back of the shoulder is often a sign of rotator cuff tendinitis and pain in the front of the shoulder is more common with biceps tendinitis.



## **Shoulder Tendinitis**

### **Common Questions**

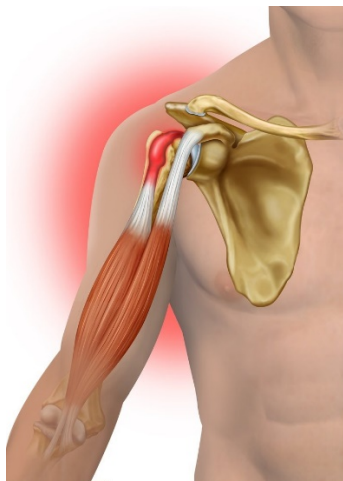
**Dr. Stetson**

#### **What is biceps tendinitis?**

Biceps tendinitis is inflammation of the long head of the biceps tendon. In its early stages, the tendon becomes red and swollen. As tendinitis develops, the covering of the tendon or what is called the tendon sheath can thicken and grow larger. The damage to the tendon can result in partial or even complete tearing of the biceps tendon.

#### **How does shoulder tendinitis occur?**

In most cases, damage to the rotator cuff tendons and also the biceps tendon is due to overuse. As we age, our tendons slowly weaken with time and the wear and tear of everyday use. This degeneration can be worsened by overuse or repeating the same shoulder motions again and again. Many jobs which require repetitive overhead lifting or sporting activities such as swimming, tennis, and baseball can also increase the risk for shoulder tendinitis.



#### **Biceps Tendinitis**



## **Shoulder Tendinitis Common Questions Dr. Stetson**

### **What are the symptoms and signs of shoulder tendinitis?**

Patients typically will have pain in the front of their shoulder for biceps tendinitis or on the side of the arm for rotator cuff tendinitis. Most patients will complain that the pain worsens with overhead lifting or repetitive pushing or pulling. The pain or achiness often moves down the upper arm and they may also have occasional snapping sound or sensation in the shoulder.

### **How is shoulder tendinitis diagnosed?**

A complete history by your doctor is very important and will often help him or her make the diagnosis. A complete examination of your shoulder is done next paying close attention to your range of motion, your strength, and any areas of tenderness about the shoulder.

### **Are x-rays necessary to make a diagnosis of shoulder tendinitis?**

X-rays help visualize the bones of the shoulder joint to make sure there is no osteoarthritis, calcium deposits of the shoulder or other abnormalities of the shoulder joint.

### **Is an MRI necessary to diagnose shoulder tendinitis?**

An MRI is useful to evaluate all of the soft tissues surrounding the shoulder joint including the biceps tendon and rotator cuff tendons. It is not a perfect test but is helpful to determine if there are any significant partial or complete tears of the shoulder tendons.

### **What is the treatment for shoulder tendinitis?**

For any shoulder tendinitis, rest is the first step to help relieve the pain. You should also avoid those activities that cause pain. Oral medications like non-steroidal anti-inflammatories can also help reduce the pain and swelling along with icing the shoulder several times a day for approximately fifteen to twenty minutes each time.

### **Is a cortisone injection helpful for shoulder tendinitis?**

A steroid injection such as cortisone can be very helpful to reduce inflammation and pain within the tendons of the shoulder. However, one usually gets the best result from the first cortisone injection and multiple injections if given improperly may also damage the tendons.



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**What about physical therapy for shoulder tendinitis?**

Specific stretching and strengthening exercises can help restore range of motion and strengthen the shoulder. Physical therapists also use other treatments which can help reduce the pain and inflammation of shoulder tendinitis.

**Is surgery ever necessary for shoulder tendinitis?**

If your condition does not improve with nonsurgical treatment, surgery may be recommended and can be helpful to reduce pain, inflammation and restore function. Surgery is typically done with an arthroscope or minimally invasive surgery with two or three small incisions. The surgeon can then accurately diagnose your problem without a big incision.

**What surgery is done for rotator cuff tendinitis?**

When rotator cuff tendinitis does not get better with conservative management, there is often more damage inside the shoulder joint than what is usually suspected or what an MRI will see. Patients may have a partial rotator cuff tear which did not show up on MRI which can be debrided or repaired at the time of arthroscopic shoulder surgery. There also may be a significant amount of bursitis or inflammation of the bursa which can also be removed at the time of surgery along with the removal of a small bone spur called an acromioplasty.

**What surgery is done for biceps tendinitis?**

Biceps tendinitis can also be confused with rotator cuff tendinitis. When symptoms do not improve with non-operative treatment, surgery can be very helpful. Arthroscopic surgery allows the surgeon to evaluate the biceps tendon and other structures within the shoulder joint which can be causing pain. If the biceps tendon is only partially torn, then it can be cleaned out or debrided. If there is more significant tearing, the biceps tendon can be cut. This is called a biceps tenotomy and can be very helpful in relieving pain especially in older patients. In younger patients, the biceps may be cut and then reattached outside of the shoulder joint. This is called a biceps tenodesis and this can also help relieve pain.

**Is physical therapy necessary after surgery for shoulder tendinitis?**

Physical therapy can be very helpful to restore motion and strength after shoulder surgery. Using a combination of physical therapy modalities and exercises, most patients will regain all of their motion and strength after shoulder surgery and return to all of their normal activities and sports.

**What if I have any other questions?**

If you have any other questions, more information can be found on Dr. Stetson's website at [www.sportsmedicinedr.com](http://www.sportsmedicinedr.com) or just call Dr. Stetson's office, we are always happy to answer any questions you may have.

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