

Shoulder Impingement or Bursitis

Common Questions



More information can be found on
Dr. Stetson's website at www.sportsmedicinedr.com

What is shoulder bursitis or impingement?

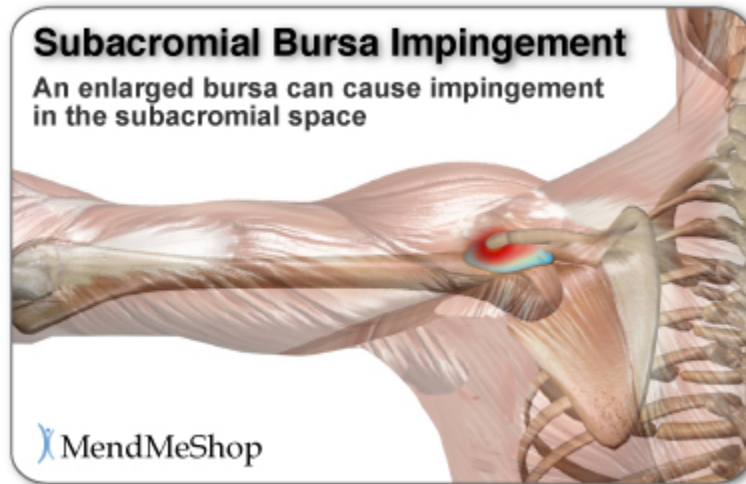
When the tendons of the shoulder become inflamed or irritated tendinitis develops. The bursa, which is a fluid-filled sac, lies on top of the tendons and also often becomes inflamed. This is known as subacromial bursitis or impingement. Just like tendinitis, bursitis may come on quickly or slowly. Pain may develop in the front or side part of the shoulder and may limit movement. Bursitis often occurs in association with rotator cuff tendinitis. Sometimes it goes away with a little rest, sometimes it doesn't. Patients often wait too long to seek treatment.



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What causes shoulder bursitis?

Shoulder pain secondary to bursitis is very common. Those who do repetitive overhead activities like swimming, baseball, and tennis are more apt to develop shoulder bursitis. Also those who do repetitive lifting or overhead activities using the arm such as construction or painting are also more vulnerable.



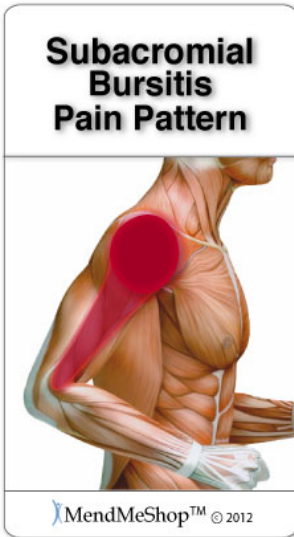
What are the symptoms of shoulder bursitis?

Shoulder bursitis often causes local pain and swelling and tenderness in the front of the shoulder and also the side of the arm. There is also typically pain and stiffness when you lift your arm. There may also be pain when the arm is lowered from an elevated position. As the problem progresses, it is more common to have pain at night with loss of strength and motion.

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How is shoulder bursitis diagnosed?

A good history and clinical exam will often times correctly diagnose shoulder bursitis. People often have pain raising their arm above their head, the so called Neer sign of impingement. Patients may also have pain when they raise their arm away from their side to ninety degrees with their elbow also at ninety degrees and then rotate their arm and forearm forward, the so called Hawkins sign of impingement.

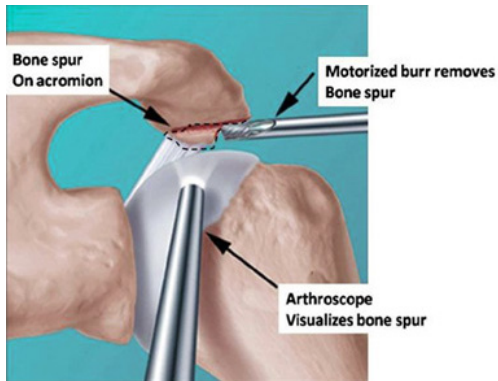
How is shoulder bursitis treated?

The majority of the time shoulder bursitis will get better without surgery. However, it may take some time and also it often takes a combination of treatments to get better. The first thing to do is to rest the shoulder and take a short course of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories. If this does not help, the next step is to see a physical therapist for treatment including stretching and strengthening exercises. A one-time injection of cortisone into the subacromial space can also be very helpful and can relieve the pain over half the cases. If all of this does not work, there are surgical options which can also help relieve the pain.

How is shoulder bursitis treated with surgery?

Sometimes a small hook of bone can catch on the rotator cuff and cause pain and inflammation of the rotator cuff muscles. This is commonly referred to as bursitis and it will sometimes respond to an injection of steroids and local painkillers. However, if this treatment does not relieve the pain, it may be necessary to perform arthroscopic surgery to shave the undersurface of the bone and also take out the bursa. This is done through three small skin incisions. Recovery time from this type of surgery is very fast and people often are able to return to their activities by six weeks after the operation.

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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 or just call Dr. Stetson's office, we are always happy to answer any questions you may have.

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