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Shoulder Impingement

What is shoulder impingement?

- The rotator cuff is a common source of pain in the shoulder and that pain can be a result of impingement. When you raise your arm to shoulder height, the space between the acromion and rotator cuff narrows. The acromion can rub against, or impinge, the tendon of the rotator cuff, causing irritation and pain.

How does shoulder impingement occur?

- Shoulder impingement can occur in young athletes who use their arms for overhead sports such as swimming, baseball, or volleyball. It can also occur in people who perform repetitive lifting or overhead activities. Pain may also develop as the result of minor injury. Shoulder impingement sometimes occurs with no apparent cause.

What are the symptoms of shoulder impingement?

- Impingement commonly causes local swelling and tenderness in the front of the shoulder, pain and stiffness when you lift your arm, pain when the arm is lowered from an elevated position.
- Early symptoms include minor pain with activity and at rest, pain radiating from the front of the shoulder to the side of the arm, sudden pain with lifting.
- As problem progresses symptoms increase to pain at night, loss of strength and motion, and difficulty completing daily activities.

How is shoulder impingement diagnosed?

- Your doctor will perform a physical exam and discuss your symptoms with you. An x-ray will be ordered to evaluate the bones of your shoulder, especially the acromion. An MRI may be ordered to further evaluate the rotator cuff muscles.

How is shoulder impingement treated?

- The goal of treatment is to reduce pain and restore function.
 - o Non-Surgical Treatment: Rest, NSAID medications to reduce pain and swelling, Physical Therapy to improve motion and strength, Steroid injection to reduce inflammation.
 - o Surgical Treatment: Arthroscopic shoulder surgery to remove bone spurs and other soft tissue that may be causing shoulder impingement.