

Physical Therapy and Swimmer's Shoulder

What is swimmer's shoulder?

Swimmer's shoulder is an inflammatory condition caused by the repetitive overhead arm motion of the freestyle stroke. The pain associated with swimmer's shoulder may be caused by two different sources of impingement in the shoulder.

One type of impingement occurs during the pull-through phase of freestyle. The pull-through phase begins when the hand enters the water and ends when the arm has completed pulling through the water and begins to exit the surface. At the beginning of pull-through, if a swimmer's hand enters the water across the mid-line of her body this will place the shoulder in a position that can impinge or pinch the biceps tendon.

A second type of impingement may occur during the recovery phase of freestyle. The recovery phase is the time of the stroke cycle when the arm is exiting the water and lasts until that hand enters the water again. As a swimmer fatigues it will become more difficult to lift their arm out of the water, and the muscles of the rotator cuff become less efficient. When these muscles are not working properly this will again impinge the shoulder. These two repetitive use injuries can result in painful swimmer's shoulder.

Why do swimmers get swimmer's shoulder?

Swimmers may have shoulder pain for many reasons. Poor swimming technique is a major factor in shoulder pain; as well as overtraining. As the muscles fatigue, they work less efficiently which has two poor consequences. First, the muscles will have to work harder in a weakened condition. Second, the swimmer will have to perform more strokes to cover the same distance, which is overusing already fatigued muscles. Together these two factors can result in swimmer's shoulder.

How can I prevent or treat swimmer's shoulder?

Swimmer's shoulder can be prevented by using proper freestyle stroke. Certain stretches for the shoulder, chest and neck muscles will also help prevent swimmer's shoulder.

Physical therapy is highly effective if you have acquired swimmer's shoulder. A combination of pain modalities, stretching and strengthening exercises are used in order to alleviate the problem as well as prevent the injury from reoccurring.

Offices are conveniently located in Clifton Park, Delmar, Latham, and Schodack.

Clifton Park: 1735 Route 9
Phone: 518.373.2042
Fax: 518.373.1293
Open M/W/F 7:00am-4:00pm
T/Th 10:00am-7:00pm

Latham: 711 Troy-Schenectady Road
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Fax: 518.220.9506
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Delmar: 250 Delaware Avenue
Phone: 518.439.2417
Fax: 518.439.1190
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Schodack: 81 Miller Road
Phone: 518.213.0398
Fax: 518.479.0493
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