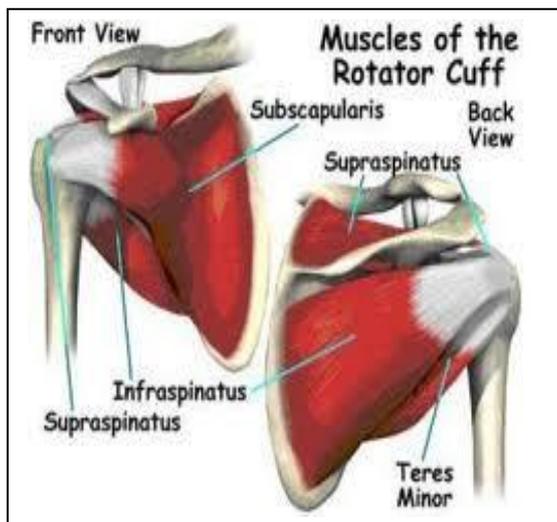


Non-Operative Rotator Cuff Tears

The shoulder is made up of three bones: the scapula (shoulder blade), the humerus (upper arm bone), and the clavicle (collarbone). There are also a number of muscles, ligaments and tendons around the shoulder. Ligaments are fibres that link bones together at a joint. Tendons are fibres that attach muscle to bone.



What is a rotator cuff tear?

A group of four muscles called the 'rotator cuff' are positioned around the shoulder joint and join into a large tendon (rotator cuff tendon). They are called supraspinatus, infraspinatus, subscapularis and teres minor and help to stabilise the shoulder joint and move the arm. The rotator cuff tendon passes through the subacromial space (the space underneath the acromion part of the scapula, or shoulder blade). It is here that a tear usually occurs.

What causes a rotator cuff tear?

In younger people a rotator cuff tear can be caused by an acute injury like a fall or accident. In older people the tear can be due to arthritis and wear and tear of the tendons. The degree of damage varies from a partial to a full tear.

What are the symptoms of a rotator cuff tear?

Pain in the shoulder that can radiate into the upper arm. The pain is worse when trying to reach forwards or to the side. Pain is usually worse at night, with difficulty lying on this shoulder. The arm is weak and you will have reduced shoulder movement. You may experience clicking or creaking in the shoulder.

What is the management of a rotator cuff tear?

Small tears can resolve with physiotherapy and surgery can be offered to patient with large/complete tears. However surgery may not be offered in all cases dependent on a number of factors including age and the risk of undertaking an operation. In older patients the tendons heal poorly and there is a greater risk of the tear occurring again. Also there are usually associated arthritic changes in the shoulder joint which leads to poorer outcomes. Some tears are painless and so you might be able to function with a tear.

What is the treatment of a rotator cuff tear?

It is important to adapt to a reduced shoulder movement eg. ensuring items you use regularly are accessible on lower shelves. You may have to **modify your activities**.

Take **painkillers/anti-inflammatories**, as advised by your GP or pharmacist.

Ice may be helpful in reducing pain and inflammation. Wrap frozen peas / crushed ice in a damp, cold towel and place on the shoulder for up to 20 minutes.

Gentle exercises (see attached) for maintaining shoulder movement.

Strengthening exercises for all the unaffected muscles in the shoulder, particularly deltoid on the top of the shoulder which can help to increase arm movement. These exercises must be done regularly and within pain.