

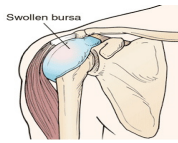


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WHAT IS SHOULDER BURSTITIS. First of all a bursa is a closed fluid filled sac. Its functions is to provide a gliding surface to reduce friction between tissues of the body. Many bursas are located next to tendons in large joints. Shoulder bursitis is an inflammation of the bursa. These sacs act as cushions where there is a friction point between two tissues. There are about 160 points in the body where a bursa exists to serve as cushions between different structures. The bursae are lined inside with synovial cells that produce the fluid in the sac.



gliding surface
friction
of the body.
located next

CAUSES. Bursitis or inflammation of these cushions in the shoulder can be caused by subtle injuries inflicted by lifting a suitcase or lifting a bag of groceries. People in professions that require repetitive motion such as bringing the arm overhead like you see in baseball pitchers, painters, wallpaper hangers, etc., etc., often develop bursitis. Sometimes it is hard to pinpoint a specific situation that has triggered the bursitis. Bad posture, poor body mechanics, falling and certain other conditions such as arthritis can cause it. The fluid in the bursa may get infected but that is rare in the shoulder.

WHAT YOU FEEL AND WHAT THE DOCTOR LOOKS FOR.

Bursitis causes pain. However the pain may not be present while your arm is by your side. You may tend to avoid certain movement of the joint so as not to trigger the painful sensation. Lifting the arm above the shoulder usually triggers the pain, however the patient may also have an aching pain at rest. The pain may awaken you from your sleep especially when you turn onto the affected side. The pain may radiate into the biceps area. Bursitis pain is usually mild to moderate and you may seek medical advise only when the problem has persisted for several months. Swelling of the bursa can interfere with the mechanics of the joint by decreasing the space between the head of the humerus (arm bone) and the tip of the clavicle (collar bone). This also decreases the mobility of the shoulder. Examination of the shoulder may reveal a swollen shoulder. It may also feel warm to the touch. There is usually pain with forward flexion of the shoulder with the arm in internal rotation and also when elevating the arm laterally above the shoulder. The doctor may hold your arm at 90 degrees of forward flexion and then rotate it internally.

TESTING. The physical examination is sufficient to make a diagnosis in most cases. At times however different test may be ordered depending on the circumstances. Plain X-rays may detect calcification of the joint capsule or of supraspinatous tendon. An outlet view may show bone hooks in portions of your scapula (shoulder blade). A CT scan or MRI may also be ordered to rule out other pain-causing problems of the shoulder which may be present such as rotator cuff tear.

TREATMENT.

Self-care at home. In bursitis that is not infected, significant relief can be obtained by applying ice packs to the affected bursa for 10 to 15 min at a time four times per day. Rest and mild pain medication will also help. After two or three days, the ice packs can be substituted by applications of heat.

Medical therapy. It is important to avoid any repetitive motion that could have triggered the bursitis. Use of an arm sling may be helpful during the acute phase for a short period of time. Adding anti-inflammatory medication will help reduce the inflammation. For many patients utilizing the above measures for a few weeks will suffice to treat shoulder bursitis. If pain persist, however, and your bursitis is not infectious your doctor may inject a potent anti-inflammatory medication in the bursa. If it is infected, the bursa may be aspirated with a needle and antibiotic therapy will be started. However, it is important to avoid any repetitive motion that might have caused the bursitis in the first place. Physical therapy utilizing ultrasounds, electrical stimulations and strengthening exercises may also be beneficial. Stretching such as the pendulum stretching exercise with, for example, a milk jug can help also in some patients.



Surgical treatment. Surgery is sometimes needed. A procedure called subacromial decompression can be performed with a probe called an arthroscope using very small incisions to introduce it. During this procedure the inflamed bursa, some bone and any bone spurs are removed.