

The shoulder (Figure 1) is a ball and socket joint that allows a wide range of movement. Because it is composed of several key structures such as tendons, cartilage and bone, the shoulder can be affected by a variety of conditions. Shoulder pain may include:

- Pain with movement
- Inability to lift the arm overhead
- Night pain, especially with trying to lay on the affected shoulder
- Weakness of the shoulder muscles

Causes

Here are some of the most common causes of shoulder pain:

Shoulder Arthritis

Wear and tear in the cartilage of the shoulder leads to arthritis.

Frozen Shoulder

Adhesive Capsulitis, known as frozen shoulder, is a condition affecting the inner lining of the shoulder (capsule). The capsule becomes inflamed and tight, leading to pain and loss of movement in the shoulder.

Shoulder Dislocation

Dislocation of the shoulder joint is most commonly caused by an athletic injury or a fall. The ball of the shoulder (humeral head) slides out of the socket. This leads to tears of the soft tissues around the shoulder and sometimes can cause bone injuries as well.

Shoulder Fractures

An injury to the shoulder may lead to a fracture (broken bone). The ball, socket or shoulder blade (scapula) can be fractured.

Rotator Cuff Injuries

The rotator cuff is where the four tendons that encompass the ball (humeral head) of the shoulder meet. Tendinitis or tears in the rotator cuff tendons may lead to shoulder pain.

Treatment

Treatment options for shoulder pain vary depending on the diagnosis but may include activity modification, medication, rest, and rehabilitation or surgery.

If you are experiencing shoulder pain, contact your doctor. Because treatment varies depending on the reason for the shoulder pain, an in-office evaluation is typically necessary.

Figure 1: Anatomy of the shoulder

