

## Quality shoulder function requires comprehensive approach

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The human body and its ability to move and adapt to external and internal stressors is truly a miracle. We tend to take our ability to do infinite activities for granted until some of these motions or positions are all but impossible because of pain or restricted movement. As our discomfort grows, our efforts to restore things to normal intensify. For some, the goal of becoming comfortable and active again may seem unattainable. It is important to not give up on exploring all options for restoring joint function and comfort.

One joint complex that can very easily become injured or irritated and can be quite difficult to restore to full function is the shoulder. The glenohumeral, acromioclavicular, and sternoclavicular joints along with the scapulothoracic articulation all work together to give us the dynamic mobility of the shoulder joint complex. The shoulder is a wonderfully flexible and versatile joint, but this ability comes at the cost of stability. Most joints can rely on bony support when muscles or ligaments become weak or stretched, but not the shoulder. Because of this soft structural support, the shoulder is prone to quite a wide range of dysfunctions.

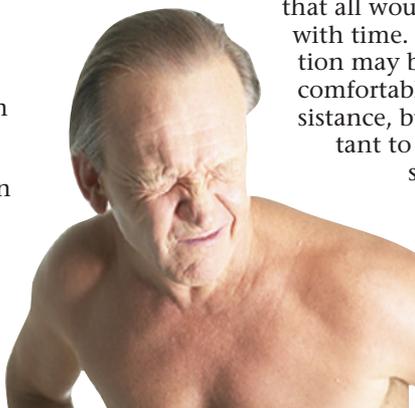
One common culprit in shoulder joint dysfunctions is not even a joint. It is the articulation between the shoulder blade (scapula) and the rib cage (thorax). If the scapula is not correctly positioned on the thorax or if it does not move at the appropriate rate when the arm is away from the body, then the shoulder cannot function as it should. This alteration in biomechanics can start in motion a variety of malfunctions throughout all the muscles of the shoulder girdle.

If the muscle balance throughout the entire shoulder complex is not restored chronic shoulder pain and restricted motion can result.

Most people know someone who has had a rotator cuff tear repaired surgically and required rehabilitation to restore function and comfort. We also have heard of tendonitis and

arthritis causing limited motion and pain. Many of us have injured a shoulder and just assumed that all would improve with time. Shoulder motion may become more comfortable without assistance, but it is important to be aware that

subtle muscle imbalances throughout the shoulder girdle may still exist that could cause the pain and restric-



tion to gradually return over time. This is especially true if the muscles of the shoulder blade do not position the shoulder joint optimally for normal function.

When the shoulder joint is injured, many muscle groups are affected. Some muscles may weaken, shorten or lengthen and lose their ability to function normally. This will gradually cause a change in the shoulder joint mechanics and if left uncorrected will eventually cause enough microtrauma to lead to pain and restricted motion.

The best way to prevent a gradual deterioration of the shoulder girdle following injury is to be sure to have a knowledgeable health professional assess the shoulder girdle complex and assist you in restoring the structures to an optimal balance. ■