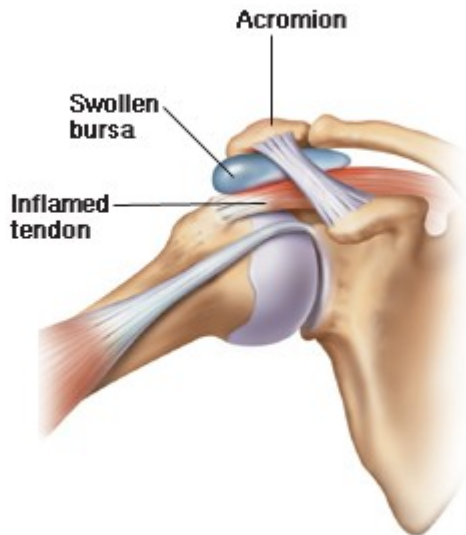


Shoulder Impingement - WHAT IS IT?

ANATOMY

The pain of shoulder impingement is caused by irritation/inflammation of the structures that lie in what we call the **sub-acromial space**. The subacromial space is an opening between the ball of the shoulder and the point of the shoulder blade (acromion). The two most important structures in this space are the **bursa**, a small sac of protective fluid and the **supraspinatus tendon**, one of the rotator cuff muscles.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms of shoulder impingement syndrome include;

- pain in the shoulder and sometimes the arm
- pain during arm movement - especially lifting, overhead activities and reaching
- pain at night, especially when lying on the injured shoulder

WHAT CAUSES SHOULDER IMPINGEMENT?

Shoulder impingement occurs because of insufficient space between the acromion and the ball of the shoulder which causes "pinching" of some of the soft tissue structures in this area. Unfortunately, once these tissues are swollen, they take up extra space making pinching even more likely.

Things that can contribute to shoulder impingement include:

- poor neck and shoulder posture
- weakness of the rotator cuff
- poor shoulder blade control
- tight muscles around the neck and shoulder
- repeated over-head activities
- a specific injury (eg; a fall)

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Shoulder impingement syndrome is usually treatable with conservative management. The exact cause of the problem should be determined using specific clinical tests. Improving the biomechanical issues around the shoulder joint which are contributing to the symptoms can go a long way in resolving this condition. Specific exercises prescribed by your physiotherapist to improve posture, muscle length and muscle strength can all help to improve the motion of the shoulder complex and reduce the pinching. Sometimes, corticosteroid injections may be required to help soothe the inflamed structures. In this case, it is still important to correct the underlying biomechanical issues in order to prevent recurrence.