

## **Rotator Cuff Tears**

Rotator cuff tears (RCT) are one of the most common problems of the shoulder. They occur as a result of tissue degeneration (age), overuse (throwing) and trauma (fall). The chance of having a tear and not knowing it (no symptoms) is approximately 10% per decade of life (50% chance by age 50). Diagnosis is made with history (specific pain patterns) and exam findings. MRI is used to confirm the tear, especially if surgery is planned. It also helps to assess size, location, severity and chronicity of the tear.

Treatment decisions depend on symptoms, size, location, function, age, goals and other health issues. Treatment can range from rest/ice/anti-inflammatory or a steroid injection (limited to 1-2 only) to decrease pain and physical therapy or home program to increase strength. When symptoms persist beyond 3-6 months, surgery is often the best method to resolve the problem. Various methods and types of surgery are available but uniformly recovery takes a few months. By 6-12 months, most patients have their normal motion, no pain and excellent strength and can return to all activity. Arthroscopic techniques are most common with more rapid and more comfortable recovery compared to open surgery. Time of recovery depends on numerous factors. Smokers have a much higher chance of having complications, especially failing to heal the repair.

Tears that are not repaired can progress to massive non-repairable tears and can lead to severe loss of function. Thus a more aggressive approach is advocated for active patients and any full thickness tear that has symptoms.

Remember that not all cases are the same and to ask questions to better understand all of the options available.