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*"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"*

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## Can a Sore Shoulder Lead to Neck Stiffness and Headaches?

Does your shoulder “grind” or do you experience sharp pain when you lift it overhead? Does it feel weak during or after throwing a ball? Does it ache after sleeping or working with your arm elevated over your head? Perhaps does it even ache at night in the shoulder and upper arm area if you leave it in its normal resting position?

If you can answer yes to one or more of these questions, you likely have a problem with the “rotator cuff” of your shoulder. The clinical term for this problem is “rotator cuff tendonitis”. In most cases, your shoulder can become very weak and sore, particularly following activities such as repetitively throwing a ball. There is often a dull ache at the back of your shoulder and around the shoulder blade that can become worse during the night. When you try to lift your arm overhead or behind your back, a sharp pain can be felt at the front or top of the shoulder.

If left untreated, your shoulder will lose a significant amount of its normal range of motion. If you continue to ignore it and attempt to keep doing your normal overhead tasks, you will have to modify how you are able to reach upwards. Because your shoulder cannot rotate upward normally, you will be forced to recruit the muscles that attach from your shoulder blade to your neck in order to do your overhead tasks. Contracting of these muscles will lift your entire shoulder blade and shoulder joint upward, allowing you to gain those extra inches of overhead reach. However, this just allows you to temporarily work around your shoulder injury.

The problem with the scenario of using your neck/shoulder blade muscles to compensate for injured or weak rotator cuff muscles is that your neck will eventually become stiff and sore. The joints of your neck are designed to be very flexible in bending forward/backward and rotating left/right. Specific muscles that reach from your shoulder blade and attach to the side of your neck are the ones that must contract repetitively to compensate for your shoulder problem and allow you to reach those extra few inches. When these muscles pull on one side of the vertebrae of your neck, your joints will become stiff and sore. As well, these same muscles will become fatigued and knotted up

with painful “trigger points”. The result is stiff joints and painful muscle spasm that inevitably leads to dull achy headaches – commonly called “tension headaches”.

If you have had a shoulder problem for some time and you are also feeling dull achy headaches at the side, front, or back of your head, see your chiropractor. He or she is highly trained to make a proper diagnosis and safely perform the best treatment to address the shoulder problem as well as the secondary neck stiffness and headaches. By simply taking medication to decrease the inflammation and pain (the symptoms) without addressing the original shoulder and neck problem (the actual cause of the problem), your long-term results will not be good.