

## SHOULDER INJURIES

Earlier I wrote about different kinds of shoulder injuries that are frequently seen in workers' comp cases. This week I am writing about the types of treatment available for shoulder injuries and what this means for workers' comp clients. Generally, treatment falls into three main categories:

1. Activity Changes
2. Medications and
3. Surgery

### Activity Changes and Exercise

This is the least invasive form of treatment. It usually consists of rest, changing or restricting activities, and physical therapy. A doctor may recommend using a sling to keep the shoulder in place.

It may also include home remedies such as using heat or ice packs. The immediate usual first treatment is called RICE, meaning:

- REST the shoulder for 48 hours.
- ICE the injured area for 20 minutes, four to eight times per day.
- COMPRESSION, putting even pressure on the painful area to help reduce the swelling. A wrap or bandage will help hold the shoulder in place. And
- ELEVATION, keep the injured area above the level of the heart.

### Medication

Medication can range from over the counter pain relievers to prescribed pain relievers in pill form to injections of numbing medicines or steroids to relieve pain.

### Surgery

In extreme cases, surgery may be needed. Arthroscopy is used to remove scar tissue or repair torn tissues. For shoulder dislocations, a doctor performs a procedure that pushes the ball of the upper arm back into the socket. Other procedures are used for larger reconstructions or shoulder replacement.

Recurring dislocations and some rotator cuff tears may not benefit from exercise, and, surgery may be recommended early in treatment. Most other times, surgery is only recommended after other types of treatment fail.

Arthroscopy is a surgical procedure where a small camera is inserted into the shoulder. The surgeon uses the images to guide miniature surgical instruments to do things such as release adhesions and repair tissue that has been torn or is causing arthritis symptoms, to suture anchors to repair torn tissue, or to repair or replace tendons.

Arthroplasty is a shoulder joint replacement procedure where the arthritic parts of the shoulder are removed and the ball-and-socket joint is replaced with a prosthesis.

For rotator cuff repairs, a surgeon may stitch the torn edges of the muscle or tendon back together or re-connect the tendon back to the ball of the humerus. Other types of surgical treatments for rotator cuffs are:

- Debridement, which removes loose fragments of tendon or damaged bone or cartilage that may be lodged in the joint. Or
- Acromioplasty, which removes some of the bone underneath the shoulder blade, or some of the ligaments between the bones in the shoulder joint to give the tendon more room to move the arm freely.

Even after surgery, an injured worker may need physical therapy, medication, and other treatment for short or long-term pain. The employee may still have restricted range-of motion and loss of full use of the shoulder. That is why it is important not to settle a workers' comp shoulder injury claim too soon. It is best to make sure there is not some sort of permanent disability after all treatment options have been fully tried and what permanent restrictions and limitations the injured employee has from the shoulder injury.

Even if you have a temporary disability from the work injury, it is best to let a qualified and experienced workers' comp attorney help you evaluate your claim. I am available to consult with you about your injury. Please call or use my website to make an appointment for a free initial consultation.