

Strain Prevention: Shoulders

We use our shoulders every time we lift, reach, or move our arms. Shoulders are versatile; however, they are also very complicated and engage muscles, ligaments, and tendons constantly. Even though shoulders are strong, they are also easier than you think to overload and injure, sometimes requiring lengthy healing time or even surgery that can interfere with every part of our lives.

Three key factors that contribute to shoulder injuries include:

1. Posture (reaching to the side or across the body, reaching forward, reaching backward, reaching up)
2. Force (pushing, pulling, lifting weight)
3. Repetition

These factors often combine to multiply force on the shoulders. Even if you can't eliminate every factor, reducing them as much as possible limits negative effects.

Your shoulders are levers. They are at their weakest and most vulnerable point when you attempt to lift something or work with your arm fully extended from your body. Take time to reposition your body to stay close to the work and give you the best chance to avoid overloading shoulder joints.

Shoulders fatigue 2 to 3 times faster during forward reaches or when elbows flare out and away from the body, even when handling no or light weights. Don't reach for things above your head or that are out of reach if possible. Relocate to another position to get closer to the work. Moving your feet to get closer to the work is less painful than a shoulder injury.

If your arms are extended to try and work with something far from your body, move carefully to avoid strain. Don't jerk to lift or pull or push objects that seem to be stuck.

Get help or use lifting aids or supports for heavy objects or when you need to hold an object for several seconds.

Take a break. If you must hold an overhead position to paint or work, let your body recover before fatigue and discomfort starts. Stretch or roll your shoulders slowly every few minutes to improve circulation.