

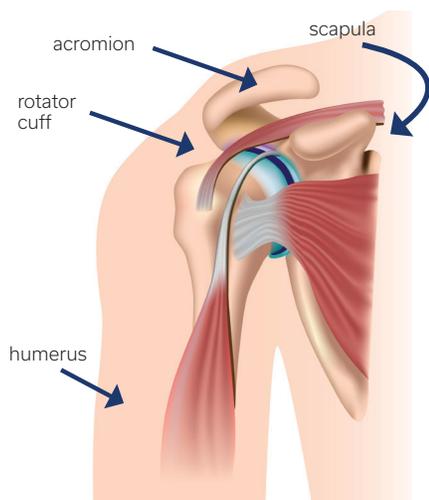
## PATIENT EDUCATION RESOURCE

# Shoulder Impingement



**"Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients."**

MARYBETH EZAKI, MD, PAST PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR SURGERY OF THE HAND



Front view of right shoulder

### What is shoulder impingement?

The rotator cuff is a group of muscles and tendons in the shoulder that connect the bone in the upper arm (humerus) to the shoulder blade (scapula). The rotator cuff gives the shoulder stability and flexibility during movement. Impingement happens when the muscles and soft tissues around the shoulder are pinched or squeezed. This pinching occurs between the bones in the shoulder and above the shoulder joint.

### What causes shoulder impingement?

There are many problems that cause shoulder impingement. The shape of the bone on top of the shoulder can pinch the tissues in the shoulder, causing impingement. Weakness of the shoulder and upper back muscles, along with poor posture, can cause impingement. Impingement may also be the result of repetitive shoulder motion, such as throwing a ball or reaching overhead.

### What are the symptoms of shoulder impingement?

Shoulder impingement is one of the most common causes of pain in the shoulder. The pain happens after activities that involve reaching behind the back or above the head. Pain caused by shoulder impingement may be mild at first, then become worse with activities and during sleep.

### What is the treatment for shoulder impingement?

Treatment can include rest, changing the ways activities are done and working with a therapist to learn exercises for posture and stretching. If pain does not improve with therapy, the doctor may recommend a cortisone injection or surgery. Surgery involves widening the space in the shoulder to decrease pressure on the rotator cuff. Therapy also plays an important role in recovery after surgery.

### What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist can explain the causes of shoulder impingement, determine which activities increase the symptoms and also provide treatment to decrease pain. After surgery, the hand therapist will provide instruction in exercises to restore flexibility and strength around the shoulder joint.



To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit the  
American Society of Hand Therapists at [www.asht.org](http://www.asht.org) or call 856-380-6856.