



HOW ATHLETIC TRAINERS ASSESS, TREAT & MANAGE

OVERHEAD INJURIES



Overhead Injuries: An Overview

Overhead injuries can happen to athletes in all sports, but most typically occur to those who perform repetitive overhead motions, such as in baseball, volleyball, tennis and swimming.

Overhead injuries are typically broken into two categories: acute or chronic. Acute injuries, such as muscle strains and tears, can occur from improper movement, while chronic injuries like tendinitis and shoulder instability develop over time and can cause long term impairments in function and performance.

HOW CAN AN ATHLETIC TRAINER HELP?

Athletic trainers work with coaches to monitor and evaluate overhead motions in athletes to identify improper technique and make modifications for safer movement to reduce the potential risk of injury.



When an injury occurs, the athletic trainer will assess and evaluate the extent of injury and then provide recommendations for management and treatment - or a referral to a physician, specialist or physical therapist if needed.

As the athlete recovers from injury, the athletic trainer will continue to work with them to ensure that their body mechanics are restored for a safe return to activity.

When to seek further treatment...



Untreated shoulder injuries can lead to lifelong functional impairments.

Along with athletic trainers, physical therapists can work with athletes throughout the healing process and provide treatment and rehab exercises to prevent future injuries.

The goal of physical therapy is to restore function while strengthening the surrounding structures to prevent further injury, and to ultimately help the athlete return to activity safely. Treatment for overhead injuries likely includes manual therapy, customized strength and stretching routines and coaching on proper technique.

COMMON OVERHEAD INJURIES

Rotator Cuff Strain or Tear

The rotator cuff includes the four main muscles and tendons that stabilize the shoulder through its full range of motion. A strain to the muscles or tear of the tendons in the rotator cuff are common amongst overhead athletes who perform repeated overhead motions. Symptoms of a rotator cuff injury can include pain from the upper shoulder down to the elbow, limited range of motion, a dull, aching pain in the shoulder and shoulder/arm weakness.

Shoulder Impingement

Shoulder impingement occurs when one or more rotator cuff tendons get trapped and pinched between shoulder bones during arm movement, causing extreme pain and swelling/inflammation of the rotator cuff.

Shoulder Instability

Also called "Shoulder Looseness," shoulder instability occurs when the labrum is damaged or torn, which causes joint shoulder weakness and a feeling of the shoulder coming out of its socket. Typical causes of this are either damage from a sudden dislocation or damage due to overuse/repetitive motion.



Elbow Tendinitis

Elbow tendinitis, also referred to as "tennis elbow" or "golfer's elbow," is the inflammation of the tendons connecting the muscles of the lower arm to the bone. This typically occurs when a person injures or overuses a tendon. Elbow tendinitis is most commonly seen in baseball/softball, tennis and golf athletes. Symptoms can include a dull ache/pain in and around the elbow and radiating into the upper or lower arm, especially following activity.



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