

## **CARING FOR THE SWIMMER'S SHOULDER**

### ***Exercise and proper technique are necessary for preventing injury***

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Swimming is a great way to get into shape and stay in shape. It gives people the chance to increase their cardiovascular output and strength without increasing the punishment on their bodies that high impact activities do. Plus, with Spring around the corner, triathlon and open-water swimming seasons are approaching and athletes are getting ready for these. But what can some one do if they get shoulder pain? How will they keep up their fitness program or get ready for the next race?

Shoulder pain can significantly decrease a person's ability to do normal daily activities such as pull on a sweater, wash their hair or pick up a child. Continuing to swim with shoulder pain without making changes can lead to serious damage to the shoulder that can lead to surgery.



Many swimmers think that because they use their shoulders while swimming they are correctly keeping them strong. This is only half true. Much of swimming involves movement that can stretch the back of the shoulder to the point that it loses its ability to hold the shoulder stable. When this happens pain can set in which swimming makes worse.

To prevent this stretching out of the muscles and tendons a proper strengthening program must be developed to stabilize the back part of the shoulder. The muscles of the Rotator Cuff, back and chest need to be worked to maintain normal balance of the shoulder joint.

In addition to a good shoulder stabilization program, proper technique must be learned from a trained coach. Many swimmers who have stable shoulders can still get in trouble by using poor technique that puts too much demand on the shoulder. By learning how to swim properly abnormal stress is taken away allowing the shoulder to work normally.

Shoulder pain is all too common from the fitness swimmer, to the seasoned triathlete, and even the Master's level swimmer. There are things that people can do to prevent discomfort, or to recover from a debilitating shoulder injury and return to the water safely.

If some one has pain with swimming, consultation with a physician is a good way to make sure no permanent damage has been done. Physical Therapy intervention can lead the swimmer with a sore shoulder back to the activity they love. Proper technique and good shoulder stabilization will prevent many shoulder injuries and keep fitness swimmers and athletes alike in the water for many years to come.

For more information about shoulder stabilization and proper swim technique assessments, call Todd J. Merry, LPTA, at Carolina Sports Care and Physical Therapy at (843) 521-1970.