

Scapular Rotation Dysfunction (SICK Scapula)

The scapula is the large triangular-shaped bone located at the back part of the shoulder. It is commonly known as the shoulder blade. The only attachment it has to the rest of the body is through the collarbone. The bone is held in place primarily by the surrounding and attached muscles. Many of the muscles use the larger area of the scapula for attachment. They enable the majority of motion within the shoulder.

At the outer part of the scapula, a shallow socket forms where the humeral head lies against the shoulder joint. Proper movement and positioning of the scapula is crucial in regaining normal movement in the joint. SICK refers to a type of injury stemming from fatigue and overusing the muscles that provide movement and stabilization for the scapula.

SICK scapulas occur when the normal motion or position of the scapula is altered. Internal rotation of the shoulder is most often reduced, so patients have trouble reaching behind their back or women have trouble reaching for their bra strap. Many of these injuries are the result of disorganized activation patterns within the stabilization muscles. It can increase the deficit associated with shoulder injuries by altering its normal role during motion. The serratus, rhomboid and trapezius need to be synchronized properly to ensure the scapular motion is smooth when the arm moves.

Due to the loss of internal rotation, this condition has been likened to shoulder impingement syndrome, which is a very common shoulder condition causing stiffness and loss of rotation in the shoulder.

Scapular Rotation Dysfunction Anatomy

The shoulder blade sits at the back, around an area of the spine called the thoracic spine, and on top of the ribs. It is attached to many muscles, and has several articulations with other bones forming multiple joints.

The shoulder joint is capable of large degrees of rotation, namely internal and external rotation (sometimes called medial and lateral rotation). Many normal day-to-day activities involve rotation to the shoulder. These include throwing a ball, washing your hair, reaching behind your back, and putting on a coat.

How to Treat Scapular Rotation Dysfunction:

1. Physical Therapy

Treating the condition is often done using physical therapy as a means of increasing movement and strength in the affected area. Kinetic exercises will help you to regain normal movement patterns. Once proper movement has occurred, you will begin proprioception exercises in an attempt to regain coordination and integration.

2. Exercise Therapy

Your manual therapist will need to prescribe range of motion exercises. These may take several months to perform to achieve the required level of rotation in the shoulder.

Tips:

- Avoid overusing the muscle and joint to prevent it from becoming fatigued and overworked.
- Try to avoid any intense and repetitive physical activity such as tennis, volleyball and throwing if you have a shoulder weakness or underlying shoulder problem.
- If you sustain an injury to one shoulder, after a few months the other shoulder could become affected as it compensates.
- Unbalanced weight training has led to injuries in the scapula, so make sure to exercise properly. Be careful with a wide-grip lat pull down (the exercise where you pull a wide bar behind your head). This is a known cause of rotator cuff problems.