

Get Active. Stay Active

I compete in triathlons. Although I am very strong on the biking and running portion of the race, swimming is my weakness. I have increased my training in the pool to help improve this area, however I am now experiencing classic symptoms of “swimmers shoulder.” What can I do?

*-Nick
Livonia*

By: Michele Mazur MPT, CSCS

While swimming is one of the best aerobic exercises for individuals, occasionally injuries can occur. The most common problem seen among swimmers is the “swimmer’s shoulder,” an overuse injury that causes inflammation of the tendons in the shoulder joint. The repetitive irritation of these tendons leads to acute inflammation. This decreases the space through which the tendons pass, causing a secondary impingement. “Swimmer’s shoulder” can be caused by faulty stroke mechanics, sudden increases in training loads or intensity, muscle imbalances, poor posture, use of training devices such as hand paddles, or a very loose shoulder joint.

Classically, the swimmer reports pain in the front of the shoulder during or after swimming, and the front of the shoulder is tender to the touch. The mainstay of treatment for overuse injuries is rest and activity modification. When possible, rest should include pool-based training alternatives such as non-aggravating strokes or one arm butterfly, to prevent further irritation of the shoulder. Frequent icing and use of anti-inflammatory medications may speed healing.

If the problem persists, physical therapy may be required. Surgery is sometimes considered for athletes with chronic shoulder pain that does not respond to conservative treatment. Prevention of this overuse syndrome is much easier than treating it midseason. Stretching and controlled warm-ups should be stressed in swimming programs at all levels. Continual reinforcement of proper stroke mechanics and adequate flexibility is essential in preventing “swimmer’s shoulder.” So in the end, preventing injury is the best medicine.

Please submit questions to our sports medicine experts at Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan by e-mailing cangelel@dmc.org. In the subject line write, “Get Active, Stay Active.” We will respond to all the questions we receive and select one each month to feature in our column.

Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan (RIM). RIM has 20 locations throughout southeast Michigan. For more information or to schedule an appointment, contact us at 1-866-4MY-REHAB or www.RIMrehab.org

