

Town & Village

Rotator cuff tears are sports injury of the '90s

While physicians and researchers emphasize the benefits of weight training to accelerate fat loss and build bone mass, such exercises might not be for everyone.

When Trina Brinkley Streeter, 32, decided to increase the intensity of her aerobic workout by adding upper-body weight-training exercises, it never occurred to her that she might be doing herself more harm than good. In less than five months, she began to experience severe shoulder pain and eventually had to undergo surgery. Her injury? A rotator cuff tear.

Rotator cuff injuries have long been associated with professional athletes. They are also common among adults who are active in sports requiring overhead motion such as swimming, softball or racket sports. This same injury is now occurring with alarming frequency among people who participate in weight-training programs involving repetitive overhead movements.

“The problem,” says **Dr. Jacob Rozbruch**, a sports medicine specialist and chief of orthopaedic surgery at New York’s Beth Israel Medical Center North, “can be especially acute in beginners with excessive joint laxity (looseness) or in people with an underlying abnormal shoulder bone anatomy.”

The rotator cuff is a group of four muscle-tendon units that control the rotation of the shoulder and provide stability to the shoulder joint. Overhead weight training requires numerous repetitions, putting continuous stress on the shoulder joint. This may cause impingement of the tendons. Over time, such continuous strenuous overhead motion may lead to bursitis, tendinitis and the worst condition, a torn rotator cuff.

“Don’t give up on these exercises just yet,” advises **Rozbruch**. “Rotator cuff problems can be avoided by following a few simple precautions.”



- Moderate your exercise program. Refrain from excessive overhead motion.
- Heed initial warning symptoms: fairly constant shoulder pain, weakness, and/or limited range of motion.
- Seek early treatment. If the shoulder is rested and treated at the first sign of a problem, a damaged rotator cuff can be avoided.

Most rotator cuff injuries can be corrected without surgery. Estimates from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons indicate that 90 percent of patients will respond to simple treatment methods such as refraining from the exacerbating activity, rest, ice, anti-inflammatory medication, and physical therapy. If the condition persists, arthroscopic or open surgery may be required. “With proper rehabilitation, full shoulder function can be restored,” **Rozbruch** assures.

For more information, visit online: www.JacobRozbruchMD.com