

What is Causing Your Shoulder Pain? Impingement? How to Tell.

The best way to think of a shoulder impingement is that some structure in the shoulder (most likely a tendon) is getting “pinched”. If the “pinching” of the structure continues, over time the tendon is going to become very sore and you may have trouble even lifting the arm. Continue to pinch the tendon and the tendon begin to wear and eventually may even tear. So, a shoulder impingement “tear” can eventually lead to a rotator cuff tear.

Common symptoms of impingement:

1. Generally, no pain when your shoulder is at rest.
2. Pain and weakness occur with reaching forward, to the side, or behind your back.
3. Over time the pain and weakness worsen.
4. It is difficult to lift objects overhead. The motion may be restricted.
5. Sharp pain is felt on the top of the shoulder.
6. Sleeping on the shoulder makes it worse.

Three self-tests you can do. Be careful because an ac joint problem can be like an impingement problem.

1. Take the hand of your painful shoulder arm and place it on the opposite shoulder. Lift the elbow as high as it will go. If you experience increased pain or tenderness you may have an impingement.
2. Painful arc. Sit sideways on a chair (on the painful shoulder arm side) Lean your shoulder blade against the back of the chair to stabilize it. Take your opposite arm and lift the painful shoulder arm and apply some overpressure at the top. If this produces/creates pain, you may have an impingement.
3. Extend the painful shoulder arm in front of you. Take the hand of your painful arm and turn your thumb down with the palm facing away. Grab your wrist and pull the arm down to your opposite hip.