

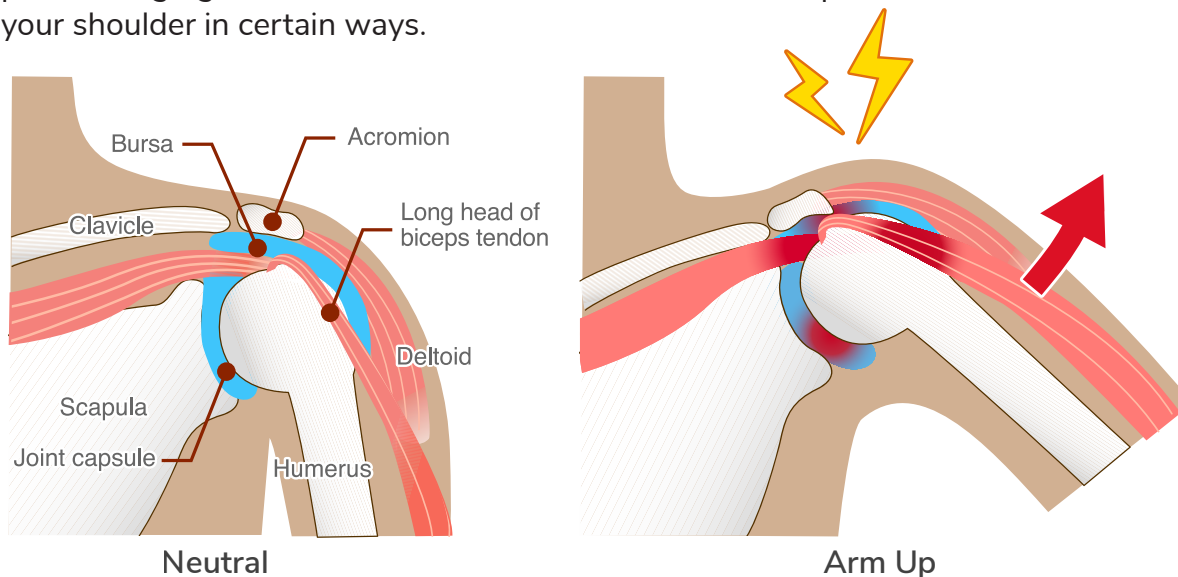
Preventing Shoulder Injuries for Wheelchair Users

Using a manual wheelchair increases your risk of shoulder pain and injury. This is due to increased strain on the shoulder joint and surrounding muscles.

Common shoulder problems

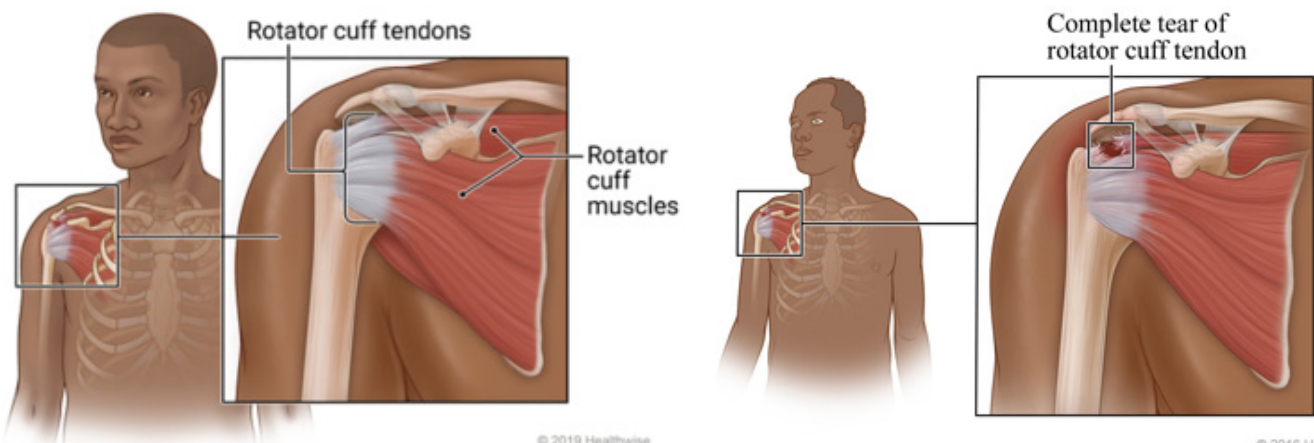
Impingement

Shoulder impingement happens when the space in your shoulder where tendons and muscles pass through gets narrow due to overuse. This can cause pain and discomfort when you move your shoulder in certain ways.



Rotator Cuff Injury

The rotator cuff is a group of 4 muscles and tendons in your shoulder that help you move your arm and shoulder. These muscles can get overworked, irritated, and cause problems. This can range from minor irritation to more serious issues, like tendon tears.



Signs and symptoms

- **Shoulder pain** on the top, back, or outer part of the shoulder. It may feel like a dull ache or sharp pain.
- **Stiffness** that limits your shoulder's range of motion during daily activities.
- **Pain with reaching** over your head or getting something from a high shelf.
- **Pain that goes down your arm.**
- **Problems sleeping** due to having pain with some sleeping positions.

If you have any of these symptoms, **STOP** and contact your healthcare provider.

How to avoid shoulder injury when using a wheelchair

Focus on long smooth strokes. **Remove your hand fully from the hand rim**, moving it in a circle back to the starting point.



How to avoid shoulder injury during daily activities

Some positions can decrease or increase your risk for shoulder injury.

Positions to Try

Shift your weight forward, keeping your elbows in front of your shoulders.



Positions to Avoid

Do NOT place your elbows far behind your shoulders.



Positions to Try

Keep your hands “thumbs up” when reaching, lifting, or carrying objects.



Positions to Avoid

Do NOT rotate your arms inward or have your hands be “thumbs down.”



Carry objects close to your body, with your elbows bent.



Do NOT lift heavy objects above shoulder height with straight arms.





Lean forward on your right side for 2 minutes and then lean forward on your left side for 2 minutes. Repeat this stretch every 20 to 30 minutes to relieve pressure.



Do NOT “press up” to relieve pressure.



Positions to Try	Positions to Avoid
<p>Sleep with a pillow under each arm: Hug a pillow to your body with 1 arm, while resting the other arm slightly rotated outward on a pillow. Alternate arm positions.</p> 	<p>Do NOT sleep on your back or painful side to reduce pain in your shoulder.</p> 

How to avoid shoulder injury with transfers

Transfers are when you move from a wheelchair to another surface, like a sofa, bed, car seat, or toilet seat. To avoid shoulder injury:

- Plan ahead. Limit the number of transfers you do when possible and when you have pain.
- Reduce the number of uneven transfers you do. It is less strain on your shoulders to move to a surface of equal height.
- When you have pain, use a slide board to reduce the strain on your shoulders.

Remember to do preventative maintenance of your wheelchair to avoid strain to your arms and other injuries.



This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, go to wexnermedical.osu.edu/patiented or contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or health-info@osu.edu.