

How to Avoid and Fix Swimmer's Shoulder Injury

What is swimmer's shoulder? Swimmer's shoulder is a general term used to describe overuse injury occurring during swimming. It represents a chronic irritation of the shoulder soft tissues – tendons – ligaments and muscles. This is also referred to as impingement syndrome. Chances are you've experienced shoulder pain or discomfort at some point in your swimming life. If this has ever prevented you from swimming, you will appreciate just how frustrating this can be. Many people spend a lot of money every year visiting a physiotherapist in an effort to manage a shoulder injury but overlook what is actually causing that pain in the first place. 9 times out of 10, this will be your stroke technique.

Correcting your technique is not actually that difficult, but you do need to know what to look out for and, just as importantly, work diligently follow your coaches suggesting to improve in these areas. ***Now that we are in our new home and video equipment on a cart just off pool deck we will be providing regular video analysis for the majority of our young athletes as it is a great tool because it really helps you identify what you personally need to work on.***

The following simple tips will ensure you avoid developing a shoulder injury from your swimming:

Body Rotation - Developing a good, symmetrical body rotation through the development of an efficient bilateral breathing pattern, breathing every three strokes is key to removing shoulder injury. **How often have you heard your coach's instruction of breathing every three strokes?**

Swimming with a flat body in the water with limited rotation along the long axis of the spine causes the arms to swing around the side during the recovery phase.

This swinging action results in large amounts of internal rotation at the shoulder joint which is the major source of impingement and rotator cuff issues. By using several key technique drills this can be easily addressed and fixed.

A hand pitch outwards with a thumb first entry into the water leads to excessive internal rotation which, from approx 3200 strokes per hour, can eventually lead to acute pain in the shoulder as an 'overuse' injury. Instead of entering thumb first, change your technique to enter with a flat hand, finger tip first. **Here at Poseidon we consistently stress the importance of a flat hand catch with fingertips down! Please listen to your coaches!**

Swimming Posture

Many swimmers don't give due attention to their upper body posture when swimming. If you inherit poor posture from your daily working life it can really affect how your muscles work when in the pool or ocean. Stand up straight, put the backpack on properly (**up on your shoulders not on your lower back**) and pinch your shoulder blades together.

Poor posture can lead to impingement, often through a severe cross over at the front of the stroke.

This can easily be improved by working on flexibility in the muscles at the front of the shoulder and chest. Doing this together with improved stabilization of the muscles at the back of the shoulder improves posture and removes cross-over at the front of the stroke.

To start to introduce better posture while you swim, think "shoulders back, chest forward".

Improved alignment and posture means that the power of the pull phase is dramatically improved because you are now applying propulsion straight backwards, the direction that will send you forward as efficiently as possible - great technique!

Good swimming technique will have the following factors in place.

1. Bilateral breathing for at least 80% of your training sessions. There are many times (especially in the open water) when unilateral breathing is the better option, but for a healthy, balanced freestyle stroke technique, bilateral breathing is the way to go in training.
2. Good, symmetrical body rotation. This can be worked upon through a range of different body rotation drills, often employing fins for support.
3. Hand entry into the water is finger tip first, not thumb first despite what you may have been taught when you learnt to swim! Fingertips down, elbows up and hips before hands!
4. Avoiding midline cross over at the front of the stroke.
5. Developing and maintaining of good upper body posture.
6. Targeting a high elbow (bent arm) catch and pull through.

Here at Poseidon we teach excellent technique by way of in line body core alignment. We start with the basics with our developmental groups and build endurance flexibility strength as our athletes grow and advance.

ICE – Is preventive medicine for those times when you feel soreness in your shoulders. I am certain you have all seen football players sitting in ice baths after a game or the baseball pitcher's shoulder wrapped supporting a large ice bag...this is about recovery...injury prevention. In fact two or three days a week I require my senior athletes to ice as their dry-land activity. We have a great big ice machine in the pool storage room adjacent to the pool. You may have seen our senior athletes icing after practice. No injuries simple prevention.

Remember, you, as the swimmer, are your own best coach. Apply the skills you are being taught and always communicate to your coach when something does not feel right! Let your coach know right away so a little technique issue is corrected and your advancement may continue!