

A Patient's Guide to **SHOULDER PAIN**

*Improved Treatment for Common Shoulder Conditions
with Active Release Treatment*

*Dr Jason Gray BHK DC MSc
Dr Stephanie Gray BSc DC*



GRAYCHIROPRACTIC



Improved Treatment For Shoulder Pain

Resolving Common Shoulder Conditions with Active Release Techniques

By Dr Jason Gray BHK DC MSc & Dr Stephanie Gray BSc DC

Do you experience pain in your shoulder when reaching overhead, lifting, reaching, or working at the computer? If so you are not alone. In fact pain and tightness into the shoulder and upper arm is one of the most common problems we see in our clinic.

Although many people hope this pain will go away with time and some rest this is rarely the case. Instead, most of these conditions actually get worse over time.

What makes things even more frustrating is the fact that traditional treatments such as medication, modalities such as e-stim or ultrasound, and even stretches and exercises for shoulder pain are often slow to provide relief. And surgery is rarely an option.

But there is some good news.....

A new treatment technique known as Active Release Techniques (ART) is proving to be a very effective method to resolve common shoulder conditions such as rotator cuff problems, tendonitis, and bursitis.

If you're not familiar with ART treatment don't worry. This is a relatively new treatment method. So what I will do in this Shoulder Pain Guide is discuss the basics of what you need to know about shoulder pain, including a review of ART treatment.

Here are the key things we will cover..

- 1 - The underlying cause of virtually every type of shoulder problem
- 2 - Why traditional treatments are often ineffective or slow to provide relief
- 3 - What ART Treatment is... and how it is so effective in treating shoulder pain

What Causes Shoulder Pain?

Whenever patients come into our office I like to make sure they have a basic understanding of their problem..... not just their diagnosis, but also what has happened that has caused their problem in the first place. When patients grasp this it is much easier for them to understand what needs to be done to fix the problem.

While there are many different shoulder conditions almost every case of shoulder pain shares a common underlying cause. Of course there will be some differences with respect to which specific muscles or ligaments have become injured, but the mechanism of how those tissues become damaged and irritated is essentially the same with virtually every shoulder condition.

So lets take a look at how the shoulder becomes injured in the first place.....

Muscle Strain, Muscle Scarring, and Shoulder Pain

The shoulder is different from most other joints in the body because it is designed to move in all directions - including up overhead, back behind the body, across the chest, and into rotation.

While this mobility allows us to perform a wide range of activities it also comes at a cost as it makes the shoulder joint less stable compared to other joints such as the elbow or knee which only move in one plane.

To help control and protect the shoulder the body relies on a complex set of muscles and ligaments. In fact, there are more than 20 different muscles that act to move and protect the shoulder.

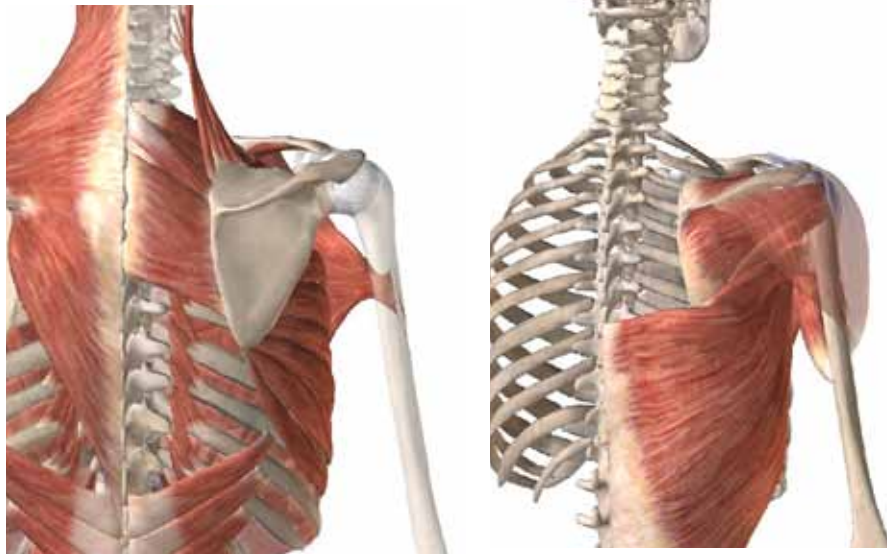
However, many of these muscles such as the rotator cuff group are small and have to work hard to control the shoulder with even basic activities that involve lifting, pushing, pulling, or reaching with the arm. The demand on these muscles is even greater with physically demanding jobs or athletic activities such as swimming, weight lifting, or throwing sports.

With excessive stress and overuse the various muscles and ligaments of the shoulder can become strained and fatigued. And over time this strain can develop into small scale tissue damage known as micro-trauma.

Initially this micro-trauma is very small and the amount of damage is not enough to be painful. However, this damage still needs to be repaired, which the body does by forming new connective tissue in and around the damaged areas.

This new tissue formation (usually referred to as scar tissue or soft tissue adhesions) itself is not a problem. In fact it is a normal and necessary part of healing. But a big problem does occur when the shoulder is subjected to the same amount of stress and overload over the course of weeks and months.

When this happens the shoulder becomes caught in a repetitive strain cycle in which the same muscles and ligaments are damaged and subsequently repaired over and over again. This process is associated with more and more soft tissue adhesion formation around the shoulder.



The body relies on an intricate system of muscles and ligaments to position, protect and control the shoulder. If any of these tissues become tight, weak, or damaged the shoulder can become compromised and more prone to pain and injury.

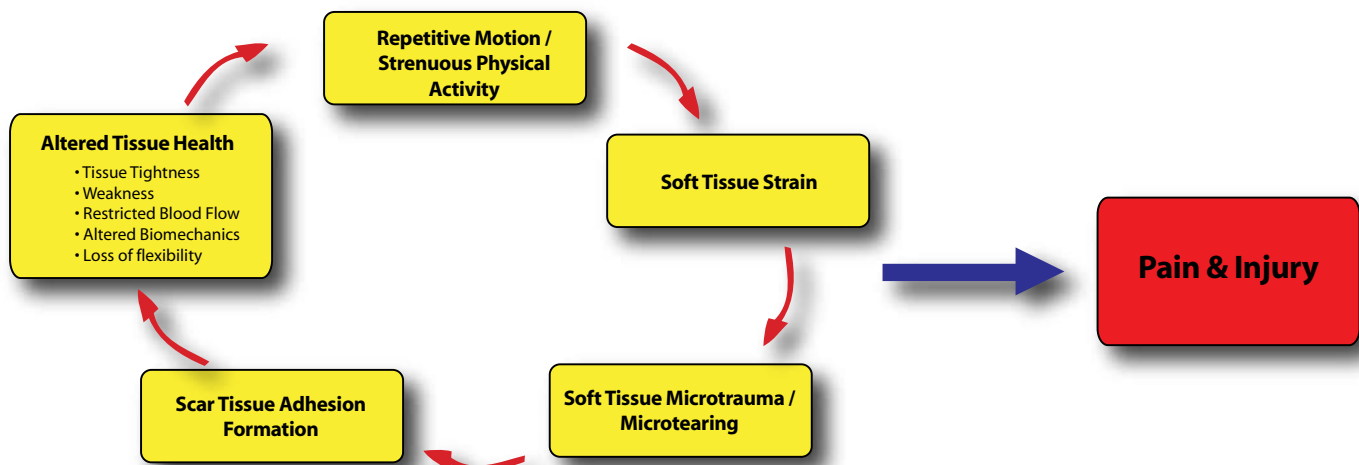
Think of these adhesions like rust and grime that can build-up in an car engine. Normally the parts of the car should be well oiled and move smoothly but when rust and grime are allowed to build-up the car begins to break down.

And just like rust, as these soft tissue adhesions begin to build up in and around the shoulder it leads to problems such as tightness, muscle weakness and diminished endurance, restricted shoulder motion, and diminished blood flow.

These adhesions are also very sticky and can cause the various muscles of the shoulder to become stuck together. This will compromise the muscles ability to slide against each other, further compromising flexibility and strength.

In many cases these adhesions can even cause some of the nerves of the shoulder to become stuck against a surrounding muscle or ligament and lead to nerve pain. In fact, it is not uncommon for a nerve entrapment to cause shoulder pain and lead to an incorrect diagnosis of tendonitis or bursitis.

As this repetitive strain cycle continues at some point a symptomatic threshold is reached and shoulder pain will develop. Although the pain and symptoms associated with most cases of shoulder pain often seem to occur out of nowhere or after a routine activity, you can see that the problem has actually been slowly developing over time and the onset of symptoms is often just the straw that broke the camels back.



The Problems with Traditional Shoulder Pain Treatment

In an attempt to treat shoulder pain a variety of treatment methods are used. Some of the more common approaches include anti-inflammatory medications, rest, ice and/or heat, ultrasound (US), muscle stimulation (E-Stim), or stretching and strengthening exercises.

Unfortunately, most of these techniques generally require a long period of time before they provide any significant relief and in many cases provide only temporary relief from shoulder pain....assuming they help at all.

The reason these approaches are often ineffective is they fail to address the underlying scar tissue adhesions that develop within the muscles and surrounding soft tissues. Remember it is these adhesions that are making the muscles and ligaments tight, binding the tissues together, and possibly entrapping the nerves around the shoulder.

Passive approaches like rest, ice, medications, and modalities like e-stim primarily focus on symptomatic relief and do nothing to address the muscle restrictions and dysfunction.

More active approaches such as stretching and exercises are often needed for full rehabilitation of the condition and to restore full strength. However, they themselves do not treat the underlying scar tissue adhesions. In fact, without first addressing the scar tissue adhesions stretches and exercises are often less effective and much slower to produce relief or recovery from shoulder pain.

Improved Treatment for Shoulder Pain with Active Release Techniques

So if all of these traditional treatments not very successful for shoulder pain, what is the solution?

Well without a doubt we have found that Active Release Techniques (ART) treatment is the most effective, quickest, and most lasting treatment solution for shoulder pain.

Active Release Treatment (ART) was developed about 20 years ago by a doctor in the United States. This may seem like a long time but as far as treatment techniques go it is actually quite new - but it is making an big impact in healthcare and is becoming the treatment of choice for many musculoskeletal problems.

In fact, virtually every professional sports team has an ART doctor on staff to help keep athletes healthy and performing at top level. And many major employers have also begun to keep ART doctors on staff to reduce workplace injury.

So let's take a look at exactly what ART treatment is and why it is so effective if treating shoulder pain....



What is ART

Active Release is a hands-on treatment method to address problems in the soft tissues of the body, including the muscles, ligaments, fascia, and nerves. What makes ART different from other treatments is that it is specifically designed to identify and treat scar tissue adhesions that build up and compromise tissue health.

By locating and treating the soft-tissue adhesions with ART it allows the doctor to to 1) break-up restrictive scar tissue adhesions, 2) restore normal movement and sliding of the muscles and nerves, and 3) more completely restore strength and flexibility of the muscles which protect and control the shoulder.

When performing an ART treatment the doctor will first shorten the muscle, tendon, or ligament and then apply a very specific pressure with their hands along that structure. To assess the area the doctor will then stretch and lengthen the tissue underneath their hand contact.

As the tissue slides underneath their contact we are able to assess the texture and tension of the tissue to determine if it is healthy or contains scar tissue adhesions. When scar tissue adhesions are felt the amount and direction of tension can be modified to break-up the scar tissue and free the problematic area.

ART takes a long time to master and after years of practice ART docs are able to develop a very acute sense of touch and feel. This not only helps us to know exactly which muscles or ligaments have become restricted and damaged, but also helps improve treatment results by allowing us to be very specific with treatment.

This is something that cannot be done with other treatment methods or with stretching or exercises which target the shoulder muscles in a more generalized fashion.

An additional benefit of ART is that it allows us to further assess and correct problems not only at the foot but also in other areas of the kinetic chain - for example at the the upper back, shoulder blade, or elbow. Problems at these areas are often key contributing factors to shoulder pain.

Even if these areas have not yet become painful they can impact how the shoulder moves and how it is positioned with activities like reaching, pushing, pulling, or throwing. Clearing problems at these areas will often play a critical role in getting the shoulder pain to resolve, especially with stubborn or recurrent shoulder pain.

How Long Does It Take to Resolve Shoulder Pain?

One of the best things about ART is how quickly results are felt. In our experience the majority of shoulder pain cases respond very well to ART treatment, especially when combined with the appropriate home stretching and strengthening exercises. Although each case is unique and there are several factors that will determine the length of time it will require to fully resolve a condition, we usually find a significant improvement can be gained in just 3-4 treatments.

Get Relief From Shoulder Pain

To learn more, or to book an initial appointment to see if ART may be able to help with your shoulder problem, simply call our office at (905) 685-7227. For general questions you can either call our office or send us an email at info@graychiropractic.ca - one of our ART certified doctors will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Dr Jason Gray BHK DC MSc



Dr. Gray is an honours graduate (Cum Laude) of Logan College of Chiropractic in St. Louis, Missouri (2004), and holds a Bachelor of Human Kinetics (Honours, Movement Science) from the University of Windsor. Most recently, he received a Master of Science degree in Kinesiology from Dalhousie University (2011), with a focus on running biomechanics and clinical assessment.

Dr. Gray has been a full-body certified Active Release Techniques provider since 2004, and has advanced training in musculoskeletal rehabilitation, strength training and conditioning, and biomechanics. He has published several articles in chiropractic trade journals and has written about and taught sport performance & injury prevention programs for a number of sports, including golf, running, swimming, and triathlon.

Dr Stephanie Gray BSc DC



Dr. Stephanie Gray is a Doctor of Chiropractic and is co-owner of Gray Chiropractic Spine & Joint Clinic. Dr. Stephanie was born and raised in St. Catharines. She completed her Doctor of Chiropractic degree from Logan College of Chiropractic, St. Louis, Missouri in 2004. She also holds a Bachelor of Science (Honours Kinesiology, Co-op) from the University of Waterloo.

Dr. Stephanie owned and operated a practice in Fall River, Nova Scotia for 9 years before returning to her roots in 2014. While in Nova Scotia, she also served as secretary to the Council of the Nova Scotia College of Chiropractors for 4 years. Dr. Stephanie is a member of the College of Chiropractors of Ontario, Ontario Chiropractic Association, Canadian Chiropractic Association. She has been a full-body certified Active Release Techniques provider since 2004.



GRAYCHIROPRACTIC

Gray Chiropractic
Spine & Joint Treatment Centre
40 Tulip Tree Common, St Catharines,
ON, L2S 3Y9
Phone: (905) 685-7227
Fax: 1-855-351-7065
info@graychiropractic.ca
www.graychiropractic.ca