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## ACUPUNCTURE & SHOULDER PAIN

To carry a heavy burden, either physically or psychologically, is to “shoulder a load.” When someone works diligently he puts his “shoulder to the wheel.” And how many times have you felt like you had the “weight of the world on your shoulders”? These expressions are common for a reason: people tend to use their shoulders in lifting, pushing and pulling, and hold a great deal of their tension in the muscles and tendons surrounding the shoulders. Daily stresses can make you feel like a real-life Atlas carrying the burdens of the world on your shoulders. Indeed, shoulder pain and loss of motion can make everyday life unmanageable, but acupuncture and herbs can help to lift that weight off your shoulders.

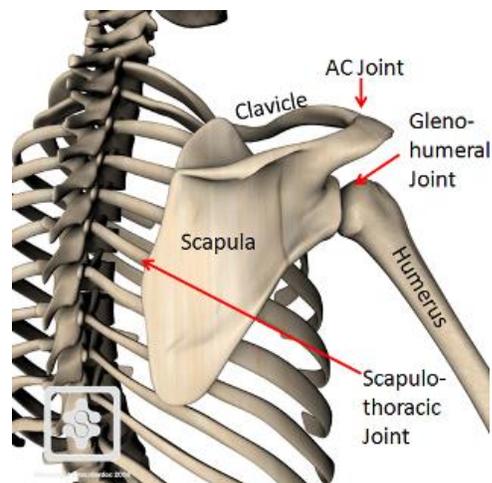
This newsletter will address the structure of the shoulder, causes of shoulder pain and the benefit of acupuncture and herbs in treating shoulder injury.

### HOW THE SHOULDER WORKS

If your shoulder is healthy you can throw a baseball, swing a golf club, and even scratch a hard-to-reach itch on your back. However if your shoulder is causing pain you may not even be able to lift your arm.

The shoulder is composed of three bones: the *clavicle* (collarbone), the *scapula* (shoulder blade), and the *humerus* (upper arm bone). While most people think of the shoulder as one joint, there is actually a system of three joints involved in shoulder movement as well as a fourth pseudo-joint.

- The main shoulder joint is known as the *glenohumeral joint*. It is composed of the *glenoid* (socket), the humeral head (ball) and the capsule of ligaments that surround it. It allows the arm to move in many directions.



- The ***acromioclavicular (AC) joint*** is where the clavicle meets the scapula.
- The ***sternoclavicular (SC) joint*** is at the junction between the clavicle and sternum. It anchors the shoulder to the wall of the chest.
- Finally, the ***scapulothoracic joint*** is where the scapula meets the ribs at the back of the chest. This is not a true joint but a junction that relies entirely on the surrounding musculature for its control. It allows the shoulder to move forward and backward.

The bones of the shoulder are held in place by muscles, ligaments and tendons. Tendons are tough cords of tissue that attach the shoulder muscles to bone and assist the muscles in moving the shoulder. Ligaments attach shoulder bones to each other, providing stability.

The complex of four muscles connecting the humerus to the scapula is called the ***rotator cuff***. The rotator cuff supplies stability and balance to the shoulder joint. Proper rotator cuff balance is essential for arm raising and rotation. When you raise your arm, the rotator cuff holds the humeral head tightly within the socket (***glenoid***) of the scapula.

This structure gives the shoulder the greatest range of motion of any joint in the entire body. Unfortunately the price paid for such splendid range of motion is a loss of stability, meaning the shoulder is easily injured or brought “out of joint.”

### **CAUSES OF SHOULDER PAIN**

Most shoulder pain involves the soft tissues, muscles, tendons and ligaments rather than the bones. Injuries of this type fall into four categories:

- Tendonitis
- Bursitis
- Injury/instability
- Arthritis

In rare instances shoulder pain may involve tumors, infections or nerve-related problems.

**TENDONITIS**: A tendon is a cord connecting muscle to bone or other tissue. Most tendonitis is due to natural wear-and-tear that takes place over the years. There are several types of shoulder tendonitis.

- ***Acute tendonitis*** occurs after repetitive motion overuse, such as throwing a ball repeatedly or other sports or work related activities.
- ***Chronic tendonitis*** results from degenerative disease or wear-and-tear due to the aging process.
- ***Splitting or tearing of tendons*** can result from either acute injury or degenerative changes in the tendons due to aging, and occurs when a tendon actually develops a

physical tear in the fibers. Rotator cuff injuries are most common among this type of tendon injury.

**BURSITIS**: Bursas are small fluid-filled sacs located around the joints to lessen friction caused by movement. Sometimes excessive use of a joint can cause these sacs to swell and become inflamed, a condition known as bursitis. The inflammation can be very painful, limiting use of the shoulder. With less use the shoulder may become stiff and very difficult to move, a condition known as “*frozen shoulder*.”

**INJURY/INSTABILITY**: Sometimes bones in the shoulder move or are forced out of their normal position. This instability can result in dislocation of one of the joints of the shoulder. Recurring dislocations can cause pain and unsteadiness when the arm is raised or moved away from the body. Dislocation loosens the tissues around the joint, making future dislocations more likely.

**ARTHRITIS**: Arthritis is the combination of wear-and-tear changes in the joint combined with inflammation, causing swelling, pain and stiffness. Arthritis may be related to sports or work injuries, or may just be due to the aging process.

### **ACUPUNCTURE & HERBS FOR SHOULDER PAIN**

Electro-acupuncture (acupuncture with electrical stimulation) is excellent in treating shoulder pain, while moxibustion – burning *moxa* (mugwort herb) on the tips of needles – will help with shoulder pain that is chronic. Depending on the pattern of disorder related to the meridians, commonly used herbal formulas are:

- Keng Shi Xiao Tong Wan
- Xiao Huo Luo Wan
- Jian Zhou Tong Wan
- Te Xiao Jing Zhui Tong Wan
- Gu Ci Xiao Tong Wan
- Shen Tong Zhu Yu Wan



In review, the shoulder is a very complex set of joints involving bones, muscles, ligaments and tendons, allowing for the largest range of motion in the body. This range of motion allows us to lift, to throw, to push and pull, to reach and twist, and to raise and lower our arms. This tremendous flexibility has a price, however, in a lack of stability that leads to a propensity for shoulder pain and injury. Fortunately relief can be found with acupuncture treatment and Chinese herbs. If you are suffering shoulder pain please contact the clinic and we will work to help you recover. Relief is possible, so don't delay!

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