Shoulders Require Ongoing Care

by Dr. A. Todd Alijani

Half of Americans over the age of 65 will experience a rotator cuff injury at some point, mostly due to aging and improper use. While most people think of this as a devastating injury, more than 80 percent of patients can be helped with some simple measures and will never need surgery, says Todd Alijani, MD, an orthopedic surgeon at Parker Adventist Hospital.

“Rehabilitation is extraordinarily effective at keeping people active, fit, and free of pain,” he says.

The rotator cuff is made up of four tendons. The supraspinatus tendon most often gets injured because the other three are underused. The easiest way to prevent rotator cuff injury also happens to be the easiest way to fix a rotator cuff: Perform specific exercises that help balance the workload.

“These are not exercises you see in a gym. That’s why you need to visit a physical therapist,” Alijani says. “If you develop a dynamic balanced shoulder, you’ll be less prone to injury and you’ll increase your overall performance.”

Patients typically require two rehab sessions weekly for six weeks while practicing the exercises almost every day for 20 minutes. Other nonsurgical measures that may help relieve the pain include:

- Rest
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (such as ibuprofen)
- Cortisol injections