

**Shoulder Calcific Tendinitis**

**Common Questions**



**More information can be found on**  
**Dr. Stetson's website at [www.sportsmedicinedr.com](http://www.sportsmedicinedr.com)**

**What is shoulder calcific tendinitis?**

Calcium deposits around the shoulder are fairly common. Hard calcium deposit can form on soft tissue, in this case tendons of the rotator cuff in the shoulder. Once the calcium deposits are formed, the tendons may become inflamed and cause pain. This inflammation and pain is called shoulder calcific tendinitis. This condition usually develops over time. Symptoms typically do not appear until after the calcium has formed. Shoulder pain may be worse once the calcium deposit begins to be reabsorbed by the body.

**What causes shoulder calcific tendinitis?**

The exact cause is unknown. The condition occurs most commonly from wear and tear of the shoulder. Aging also plays a part in its development. It is more common among people over the age of 40 but develop most frequently in women between 35 and 65 years of age.

**Why do calcium deposits form around the shoulder?**

Most calcium deposits have no known cause. People often believe the deposits occur from too much calcium in their diet, so they ask if they should reduce their calcium intake. This should never be used as a form of treatment, since a normal balanced diet with a calcium supplement of up to 1000 mg a day is healthy; particularly for anyone past 55 years of age, and for post-menopausal women.

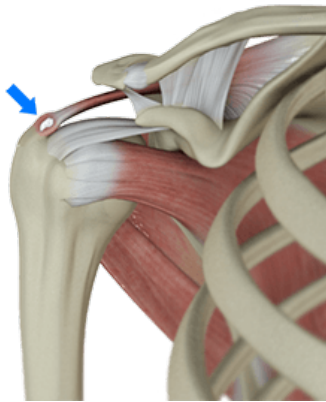
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#### How are calcium deposits diagnosed?

Calcium deposits are usually diagnosed with a routine x-ray. In some patients, they are just an incidental finding and cause no pain or symptoms. However, if the calcium deposit becomes too large or starts to grow, it can cause severe pain as it starts to erode the rotator cuff.



#### How do calcium deposits cause pain in the shoulder?

The calcium deposit can erode the rotator cuff and cause pain and destruction of the rotator cuff tendon. Many calcium deposits are present for years without causing pain. Only when they are large enough to be pinched between the bones when the shoulder is elevated do they cause pain. Smaller deposits may cause pain if they become inflamed, especially when the calcium salts leak from the deposit into the sensitive bursal tissues of the joint lining.

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#### Will the calcium deposit damage my shoulder?

Some calcium deposits can cause erosion by destroying a portion of the rotator cuff tendon. However most calcium deposits remain on the outside of the rotator cuff tendon in the bursa and only cause problems because of the pain caused when they catch during shoulder movement.

#### Is the calcium deposit hard like a rock?

In the early part of formation, most calcium deposits are very soft like toothpaste, but when they have been present for a long period of time, they dry and become chalk-like, sometimes even turning to bone.

#### Are x-rays and an MRI necessary to diagnose shoulder calcific tendinitis?

A calcium deposit is often seen on a plain x-ray. An MRI is also very helpful to help diagnose other abnormalities of the shoulder which can also occur.



#### What is the best treatment for calcium deposits of the shoulder?

What is the best treatment for a calcium deposit depends on what sort of symptoms it is causing. When the calcium deposit becomes inflamed, either because it ruptures and leaks calcium salts into the bursa, or because it pinches the bursa or rotator cuff, the pain can be quite severe. The acute inflammation can be treated with ice packs over the area and rest in a sling, and oral anti-inflammatory medications are also helpful. A cortisone injection directly into the area of the calcium deposit may provide relief with a few hours, but without it, severe pain may last for several days.

#### Will calcification cause any permanent damage?

Yes. A long-term calcification may cause pressure on the rotator cuff tendon which may damage portions of the tendon permanently.

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#### **Should calcium deposits be removed?**

If someone has two or three episodes of recurrent pain and inflammation in the shoulder, or if the calcium deposit appears on x-ray to be enlarging, then arthroscopic surgery to remove it should be considered.

#### **What is involved in arthroscopic surgery to remove calcium deposits?**

The procedure is done as outpatient surgery under general anesthesia. The operation is painless, and only a mild aching sensation is felt for a few days after the operation while the skin puncture sites heal. If the calcium has eroded in a hole in the rotator cuff, then it may be necessary to repair the rotator cuff tendon and also remove a portion of the overhanging bone which will cause a little more discomfort for a few days.

#### **Will calcification return once the deposits have been removed?**

It is highly unusual for calcifications to return in the same shoulder.

#### **What if I have any other questions?**

If you have any other questions, more information can be found on Dr. Stetson's website at [www.sportsmedicinedr.com](http://www.sportsmedicinedr.com) or just call Dr. Stetson's office, we are always happy to answer any questions you may have.

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