

Shoulder Biceps Tendon Tears
Common Questions
Dr. Stetson

Shoulder Biceps Tendon Tears

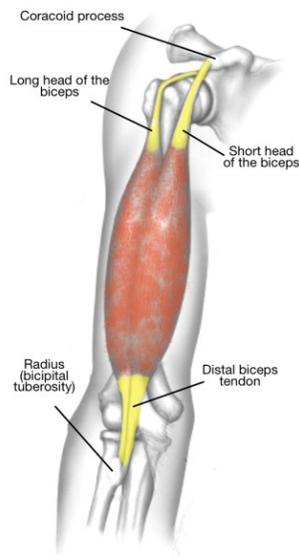
Common Questions



More information can be found on
Dr. Stetson's website at www.sportsmedicinedr.com

What is the biceps tendon?

The biceps tendon attaches the biceps muscle to the bones in the shoulder and also in the elbow. The upper end of the biceps muscle has two tendons that attach it to the bones of the shoulder. The long head attaches to the top of shoulder joint near the socket. The short head attaches to the shoulder blade in the area called the coracoid process. The long head of the biceps tendon is the one most commonly injured.



Shoulder Biceps Tendon Tears

Common Questions

Dr. Stetson

Which of the biceps tendons is most commonly injured?

The long head of the biceps tendon is more likely to be injured. This is because of its location as it travels through the shoulder joint to its attachment at the top of the socket or glenoid. The short head of the biceps tendon rarely tears. Because the biceps has two attachments, many people can still have function of their biceps muscle even after a complete tear of the long head.

What are partial tears of the biceps tendon?

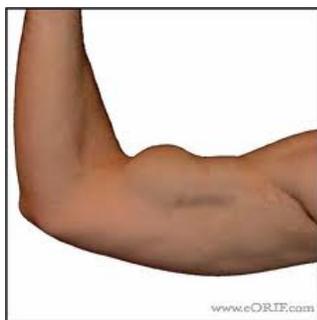
Biceps tendon tears can be partial tears or complete tears. Partial tears do not completely sever the tendon and are still partially attached. As the damage progresses, the tendon can completely tear.



Biceps Tendinitis or a Partial Tear

What is a complete tear of the biceps tendon?

A complete tear of the biceps tendon is when the tendon becomes completely detached or ruptures from within the socket. Patients will have what is called a “Popeye” deformity of their arm or a bump. This bump is the ruptured tendon and muscle which then slips down into the middle of the arm.



Shoulder Biceps Tendon Tears

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What causes a biceps tendon tear?

There are two main causes of biceps tendon tears. One cause is just overuse and the second is caused by an acute injury with a fall or lifting something too heavy. Many tears are just the result of a wearing down and fraying of the tendon that occurs slowly over time. It can also be aggravated by repeated shoulder motions with work or sporting activities. An acute injury usually occurs with a hard fall on an outstretched arm which can also injure other parts of the shoulder.

Are there risk factors for a biceps tendon tear?

As we get older, there is more wear and tear on our tendons and the biceps tendon is at more risk of tearing. Heavy overhead activities or weightlifting can also put the biceps tendon at risk for rupturing. Repetitive overhead sports such as swimming or tennis can also cause more wear and tear of the biceps tendon leading to eventual complete tearing.

What are the symptoms and signs of a biceps tendon tear?

With an acute tear, there is a sudden, sharp pain that is felt in the upper arm. There is also sometimes an audible pop or snap. There is often bruising from the middle of the upper arm down toward the elbow. Because a torn tendon can no longer keep the biceps muscle tight, a bulge may appear in the upper arm above the elbow, a so called “Popeye” muscle.



What will the doctor do during my examination for a biceps tendon tear?

After taking a complete history, your doctor will examine your shoulder. The diagnosis is often obvious for complete ruptures because of the deformity of the arm muscle, the so called “Popeye”

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Dr. Stetson

deformity. A partial tear is less obvious and usually does not produce a deformity like a complete rupture does.

Will I need x-rays or an MRI to help diagnose a biceps tendon tear?

X-rays can be helpful in ruling out other problems in shoulder. An MRI can also be helpful if there is a question of whether or not the biceps tendon is completely torn and to also make sure there is nothing else damaged or torn inside the shoulder.

How is a torn biceps tendon treated?

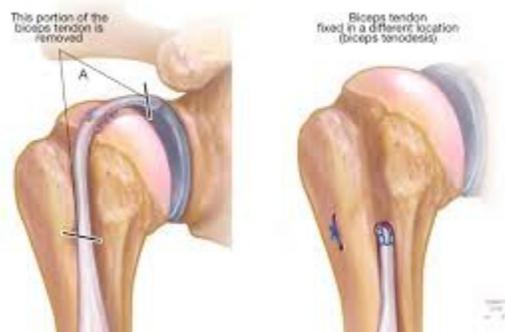
The first thing to do is to reduce the swelling by applying ice or cold packs to the upper arm for fifteen to twenty minutes at a time several times a day. Do not apply the ice directly on the skin but rather put a cloth or something in between to prevent an ice burn to the skin. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications like ibuprofen can also help reduce the pain and swelling and should be taken along with frequent icing of the arm. Resting the arm and limiting any lifting or overhead activities will also help.

Is surgery necessary for a torn biceps tendon?

Surgical treatment for a long head of the biceps tendon tear is rarely needed. However, some patients will develop cramping of the muscle. Athletes or manual laborers may require surgery to prevent cramping and restore complete strength and function to the shoulder.

What surgery is done for a torn biceps tendon?

There are several different procedures that have been developed for a torn biceps tendon. An arthroscopic procedure can be done along with a small, open procedure depending on the severity of the tear. If the biceps is partially torn, it can be debrided arthroscopically only or if the tear is too severe, it can be cut and reattached outside the shoulder joint. This is called a biceps tenodesis. If the tendon is torn completely, an open surgery is necessary to find the tendon and then reattach it outside the joint. This is also called a biceps tenodesis.



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Common Questions

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Is physical therapy necessary after a biceps tendon surgery?

Physical therapy and rehabilitation is very important when recovering from any shoulder surgery. This is typically done twice per week for the first two to three months after surgery and then a home program is recommended. This will help regain motion and strength to your shoulder and allows most patients to resume all of their normal activities.

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 or just call Dr. Stetson's office, we are always happy to answer any questions you may have.

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