

# Policy for Subacromial Pain Syndrome in Adults

## Category: Not Routinely Commissioned

### What is Subacromial Pain in Adults?

Subacromial pain in adults is one of the most common causes of non-traumatic shoulder pain and is a normal part of ageing. It also can be known as 'rotator cuff disease', which is thought to be the wear and tear of the rotator cuff tendons.

The rotator cuff tendons hold the shoulder joint in place and allow people to lift the arm and reach overhead. When the arm is lifted, the rotator cuff tendon passes through a narrow space at the top of the shoulder, known as the sub-acromial space.

### A Normal Shoulder

**Acromion** (top back part of the shoulder blade)

**Coracoacromial ligament** (fibrous connective tissue that extends to the coracoid process)

**Bursa** (flat membrane that keeps shoulder parts from rubbing against each other)

**Supraspinatus** (tendon and muscle that help form the rotator cuff)

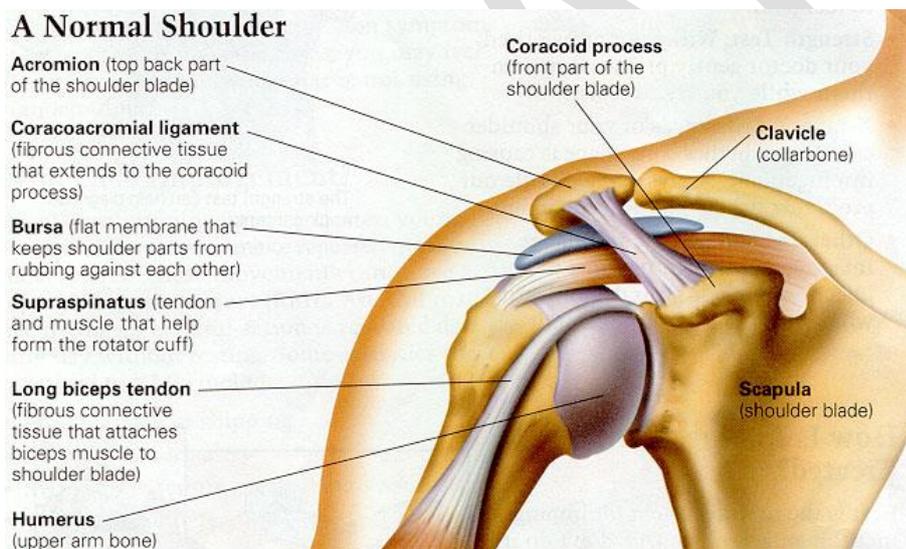
**Long biceps tendon** (fibrous connective tissue that attaches biceps muscle to shoulder blade)

**Humerus** (upper arm bone)

**Coracoid process** (front part of the shoulder blade)

**Clavicle** (collarbone)

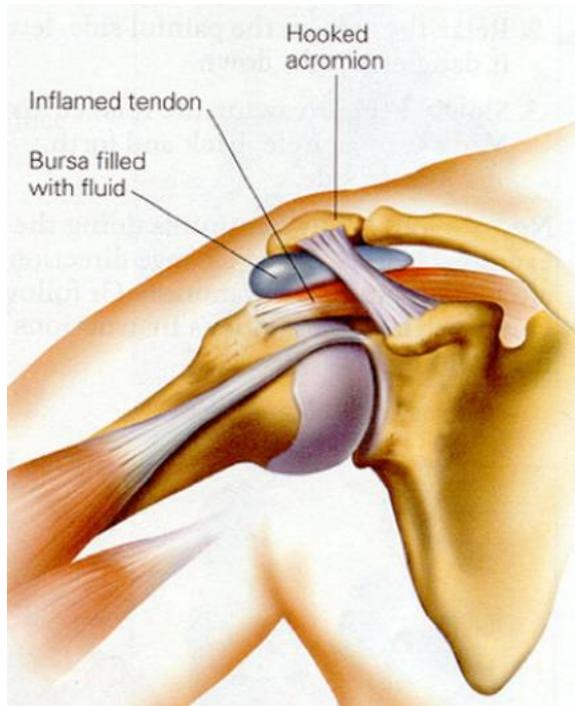
**Scapula** (shoulder blade)



Shoulder impingement (pain in the top and outer side of the shoulder) occurs when the tendon rubs or catches on the acromion and the sub-acromial bursa. Pain may start suddenly or come on gradually, and may occur if the tendon is swollen, thickened or torn due to injury, overuse or age-related 'wear and tear'.

- the subacromial bursa becomes irritated and inflamed (bursitis)
- the acromion is curved or hooked, rather than flat
- there are bony growths (spurs) on the acromion

Shoulder impingement will often improve in a few weeks or months, especially with prescribed shoulder exercises.



Subacromial Pain Syndrome

### Treatment

Arthroscopic sub-acromial decompression is a series of surgical 'keyhole' procedures to different parts of the shoulder. It involves decompressing the sub-acromial space by removing bone spurs and soft tissue arthroscopically.

### Risks

There is a small risk of infection (less than 1%), worse pain and stiffness around the shoulder (less than 1%), damage to the nerves and blood vessels around the shoulder (less than 1%) and an occasional need to re-do the surgery (less than 5%).

### Eligibility criteria

Due to the limited quality of evidence of clinical and cost effectiveness, surgery for sub-acromial pain syndrome is not routinely commissioned.

This means the patient's NHS commissioning organisation (CCG), who is responsible for buying healthcare services on behalf of patients, will **only** fund the treatment if an Individual Funding Request (IFR) application has shown exceptional clinical need and the CCG supports this.

### Advice and further guidance

For more information, search for 'shoulder pain' or 'shoulder impingement' at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)