

MUSCLE STRAIN — SHOULDER & ARM

Deltoid Strain

Understanding your injury and getting back to full speed

WHAT IS IT?

The deltoid is the rounded cap of the shoulder with front, middle, and rear portions that lift the arm in every direction. True deltoid strains are uncommon and usually follow direct overload.

A **strain** means muscle fibers were overstretched. We grade strains I–III: **Grade I** — mild, microscopic fiber injury; **Grade II** — moderate, a partial tear with strength loss; **Grade III** — severe, complete disruption.

HOW IT HAPPENS

Heavy overhead pressing, repetitive lateral raises, or a direct eccentric jolt to the raised arm.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Aching over the outer shoulder cap with lifting the arm, tenderness directly over the muscle, no night pain or catching.

HOW LONG RECOVERY TAKES

- **Grade I:** 1–2 weeks
- **Grade II:** 2–5 weeks
- **Grade III:** 6–8 weeks

TREATMENT

Almost all muscle strains heal without surgery. For the first 72 hours: relative rest, ice 15–20 minutes several times daily, compression, and *gentle* motion — complete rest slows healing. Then a progressive program: pain-free motion → isometrics → strengthening → **eccentric loading** (strengthening the muscle while it lengthens — the phase that prevents re-injury) → sport-specific work.

Progressive deltoid raises through pain-free arcs with scapular control work.

RETURNING TO SPORT

Return when strength is at least **90% of the other side**, motion is full and pain-free, and you can perform your sport's movements at full speed without hesitation. Returning before the muscle is re-strengthened is the main cause of re-injury.

PREVENTING THE NEXT ONE

Balanced shoulder programming and graduated overhead volume.

WHEN TO CALL US

Because rotator cuff problems imitate deltoid pain, persistent symptoms beyond a few weeks — especially with weakness or night pain — should be re-examined.

CALL THE OFFICE RIGHT AWAY

Pain not controlled by medication, fever over 101.5°F, spreading redness or warmth, or new numbness or weakness. Direct office line (513) 441-5639; after hours (513) 354-3700.



SCAN FOR THE LATEST VERSION ONLINE

robertpettitmd.com/handouts/deltoid-strain.pdf

This handout is for general patient education and does not replace personalized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given by Dr. Pettit and your care team.