PRESIDIO Sport & Medicine

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Shoulder Pain and Surfing

Shoulder pain is extremely common among active surfers. Much like swimming and throwing, surfing requires repetitive overhead movements, which may lead to overuse injuries at the shoulder. Shoulder impingement and rotator cuff tendonitis are the most common injuries which often occur due to abnormal movement patterns of the humerus (upper arm bone) and scapula (shoulder blade). In surfing, the repetitive nature of paddling can lead to inflammation and tissue breakdown within the shoulder. Lack of proper strength and endurance in the scapular stabilizing muscles and rotator cuff (4 key muscles that support and rotate the shoulder joint) predominately lead to the abnormal movement patterns. Additionally, poor trunk and core strength further contribute to the overuse occurring at the shoulder.

To prevent shoulder injury and improve paddling power and efficiency, every surfer should include exercises for their core and trunk muscles, scapular stabilizing muscles, and rotator cuff in their fitness routine. Below are 4 exercises as a sample workout to target these muscle groups.

1. Plank: Your trunk needs to act as an extension of the board; a floppy core equals inefficient paddling and wasted transfer of energy between the board and the water during propulsion. End result: more strain on the shoulder. For a demonstration >> Click Here

2. Prone T's: Your scapular stabilizing muscles anchor your shoulder blade to your trunk and play an integral role in the position of your shoulder when your arm moves; weakness of these muscles equals poor alignment of the shoulder and inefficient transfer of force between the arm and trunk. End result: more strain on the shoulder. For a demonstration >> Click Here

3. Prone Lat Pulse: Your latissimus dorsi (Lat) is your major force generating muscle when paddling. A lack of core stability and poor alignment between the scapula and humerus will result in decreased endurance and efficiency of your lats. End result: compensation and over use of deltoid and rotator cuff. For a demonstration >> Click Here

4. Side Lying External Rotation: Your rotator cuff acts primarily as a stabilizing muscle for your shoulder when paddling and secondarily as a force generating muscle. However, with the repetitive nature of paddling and potential for compensation and abnormal mechanics, your rotator cuff can suffer if not strong enough to withstand the abuse. For a demonstration >> Click Here

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