

SHOULDER CALCIFIC TENDONITIS

What is Calcific Tendonitis?

Calcific tendonitis refers to a build-up of small, usually 1-2 centimeter in size, calcium deposits within the tendons of the rotator cuff. When calcium builds up in the tendon, it can cause a build up of pressure and a chemical irritation. This leads to pain. The pain can be extremely intense.

In addition to the chemical irritation and pressure, the calcific (calcium deposit reduces the space between the rotator cuff and the acromion, as well as affecting the normal function of the rotator cuff. This can lead to subacromial impingement between the acromion and the calcium deposit in the rotator cuff when lifting the arm overhead.

The cause of the calcium build-up in the rotator cuff is not known. It tends to be more common in people between the ages of 30-40 years of age and has a higher incidence in diabetics. The calcium deposits will often spontaneously resolve after a period of one to four weeks.

Diagnosis

The calcific deposit can be seen on plain x-rays, however ultrasound scan is better to find small calcific deposits which can be missed on x-rays. Ultrasound also makes it possible to assess the size of the deposit in all directions.

Treatment

Treatment of calcific tendinitis may include:

1. Painkillers and anti-inflammatory medications
2. Therapy
3. Cortisone steroid injections - reduces inflammation and controls the pain
4. Surgical excision

Surgery

Surgery may be required if the pain is not controlled with the methods described or the pain is severe. The goal of any surgery is to reduce the effects of impingement, by increasing the amount of space between the acromion and the rotator cuff tendons, which will then allow for easier movement and less pain and inflammation. The calcium deposit is also debrided and released at the same time. The operation performed is arthroscopic subacromial decompression and excision of the calcific deposit.

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