About Labral Tears

Shoulder Anatomy

3 bones make up the shoulder:

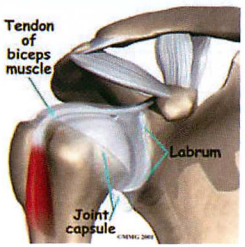
- scapula (shoulder blade)
- humerus (upper arm bone)
- clavicle (collarbone).

- As the arm is raised, the rotator cuff muscles keep the humerus tightly in the socket of the scapula, the glenoid. The glenoid is very shallow and flat.

- The labrum is a rim of soft tissue that makes the socket more like a cup. The labrum turns the flat surface of the glenoid into a deeper socket that molds to fit the head of the humerus.

- Labral tears occur when labral tissue gets caught between the glenoid and the humerus. If the tear worsens, it can become a flap of tissue that moves in and out of the joint, causing pain and catching when you move your shoulder.

- Several tendons and ligaments that maintain shoulder stability attach to the labrum, so the shoulder often becomes less stable after a labral tear.



What Causes Labral Tears?

Labral tears commonly occur as a result of a direct injury to the shoulder. They can also occur as a result of overuse.

- An injured labrum can lead to shoulder instability. The extra motion of the humerus within the socket can further damage the labrum.
- The biceps tendon attaches to the front of the labrum. Sports can result in labral tears when the biceps tendon pulls strongly on the labrum. Examples of such movements in sports include the following:
  - Pitchers: throwing
  - Weightlifters: overhead press
  - Golfers: club striking ground during swing

Symptoms

Common symptoms of labral tears include the following:

- Pop or catching sensation in the shoulder with certain movements, followed by a vague ache for several hours
- Shoulder instability may cause the shoulder to feel loose, as though it slips with certain movements

How Physical Therapy Can Help

Physical Therapy can help patients with labral tears in a number of ways, both before and after surgery to repair the tear.

- Modalities (heat/ice, electric stimulation, ultrasound) to decrease pain/inflammation and promote healing
- Therapeutic exercises to strengthen rotator cuff muscles and stabilizers of the scapula
- Manual techniques to improve shoulder range of motion (ROM)
- Personalized home exercise program to maintain strength/flexibility outside of therapy
- Education on body mechanics, technique modifications to prevent future recurrence

With physical therapy, many patients gain relief from their labral tear symptoms and are able to return to full activity with improved strength and flexibility.