

When Compulsions Hurt: The Connection Between OCD and Shoulder Pain

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INTRODUCTION

- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is marked by intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviors (compulsions) aimed at reducing anxiety.
- While OCD's psychological effects are well-known, its connection to musculoskeletal (MSK) pain is less studied. Emerging research suggests that compulsions can contribute to overuse injuries and chronic pain, particularly in exercise-related compulsions.
- The link between psychiatric disorders and chronic pain is well-established, with individuals who have conditions like OCD being more prone to persistent pain.
- Although specific research on OCD and MSK pain is limited, compulsive behaviors could strain certain muscle groups. Given the strong impact of psychiatric disorders on chronic pain, thorough psychiatric screenings are essential for patients with MSK pain. OCD is often missed in these evaluations, despite its potential to worsen physical symptoms through compulsive behaviors.

CASE PRESENTATION

We present a 20-year-old male with chronic left lateral and posterior shoulder pain that gradually worsened over four years. His pain is exacerbated with shoulder external rotation and extension. He denied any specific inciting event but reported a history of excessive daily exercising and lifting for hours at a time. Upon further questioning, he mentioned a recent possible diagnosis of OCD and anxiety that has been untreated.

Physical Exam:

- + Positive empty-can test
- + Positive push-off test

RESULTS

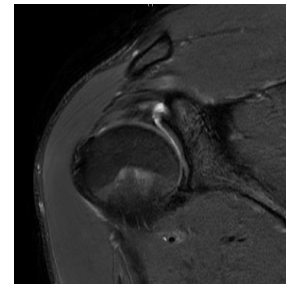


Figure 1. MRI showing moderate supraspinatus tendinopathy

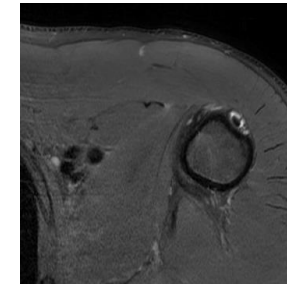


Figure 2. MRI findings of biceps tendinosis and tenosynovitis

Injury likely due to overuse and improper techniques from his compulsive behaviors.

Patient was recommended to follow up with psychiatry for appropriate medication management and psychotherapy, along with occupational therapy for his shoulder.

DISCUSSION

This case serves to highlight the **association between psychiatric disorders and pain**, underscoring the importance of assessing and treating underlying psychiatric conditions, which can significantly influence a patient's experience of pain.

Proper diagnosis and screening for all psychiatric disorders is vital and recommended for effective management of pain regardless of origin, including compulsive behaviors in OCD, which are often overlooked.

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