What Can Your Hands Tell You About Your Shoulder Pain?
By: Aaron Brooks

Stand in front of a mirror and take a look at your hands. What do you see? If you said two hands you are correct! Seriously, if you pay careful attention to the position of your hands you can often identify the root cause of your shoulder pain. When I work with a client who has some type of shoulder pain I will often point out their hand position because it is an obvious misalignment for them to see. It is a perfect example of a kinetic chain, or in other words, how one part of the body directly influences another part. In this case how the hand can affect the position and function of the elbow and shoulder and the opposite holds true as well; the shoulder can affect the position and function of the elbow, wrist and hand. Our entire body works this way, which is why I have concerns with certain medical treatments that only work on one specific area of the body.

If you have shoulder pain you can perform this experiment to see if you can identify any of the postural deviations I note below. First stand in front of a mirror so you can see yourself from your knees up to you head. Next close your eyes and march in place for fifteen seconds and think about something other than your posture. Next open your eyes and don't move or correct any of your body positions.

Three Common Deviations to Look For and What They Tell You

1. One hand hanging lower than the other – (noted from front view)

a. One shoulder is either elevated or depressed causing the asymmetry in arm lengths.
b. One scapula (shoulder blade) is upwardly rotated or elevated. Or one scapula is depressed.
c. Torso is laterally flexed (tilted) to one side. With this particular finding you will also see a greater gap between one forearm and the hip.

With this particular finding the muscles on each side of the neck, upper back and arm will have different tensions. Side note – muscles basically have two attachment points so when you see any type of deviation between both sides of the body the muscles will have different tensions thus changing the position of the joint and ultimately affecting the joint movement and function. When the arm of the elevated shoulder is raised the trapezius muscle (the muscle located between the shoulder and neck) will contract and elevate the entire shoulder complex, which creates compression in the shoulder joint. This is how you end up bursitis or rotator cuff impingement or bicep tendonitis.

2. One hand pronated (turned inward) greater than the other – (noted from front view)

a. One shoulder is rotated anteriorly (forward)
b. One scapula (shoulder blade) is abducted (pulled away from the spine).

With this finding the side that the hand is turned inward will usually be the shoulder that has the pain. When one shoulder blade is further away from the spine it creates less space in the shoulder joint and will compress the tendons and other soft tissues within the shoulder. This is especially true when you try to lift your arm up and then try to rotate your arm backwards like you were about to throw a ball or serve in tennis.

3. One hand in front of the other – (noted from front and side view)

a. One shoulder is anteriorly rotated. (forward)
b. The torso is rotated (turned from right to left or vice versa) – (side, front and back view)

With this finding the shoulder position is a result of the torso position. If the torso was rotated from right to left, so the right side would be forward of the left, the right shoulder could be forward in attempts to decrease the torso rotation or the left shoulder could simply fall into the torso rotation therefore be forward of the right shoulder. Either way the shoulder that is forward typically will be the painful one –similar to the situation that occurs in the number 2 scenario.

If you have shoulder pain try this experiment or if you know someone that does pass this along to them. We will be waiting here to help you.

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