



THORACIC OUTLET SYNDROME

If you suffer from pain or numbness in your arm or hand, a visit to your physical therapist could lead to answers and relief.

An Overlooked Condition

Thoracic Outlet Syndrome (TOS) is a frequently overlooked condition **causing pain in the neck, shoulders, and down the arm** due to compressed nerves or blood vessels. Often observed in overhead athletes and those whose jobs require repetitive upper extremity movement, there are certain **factors which increase the risk of developing TOS:**

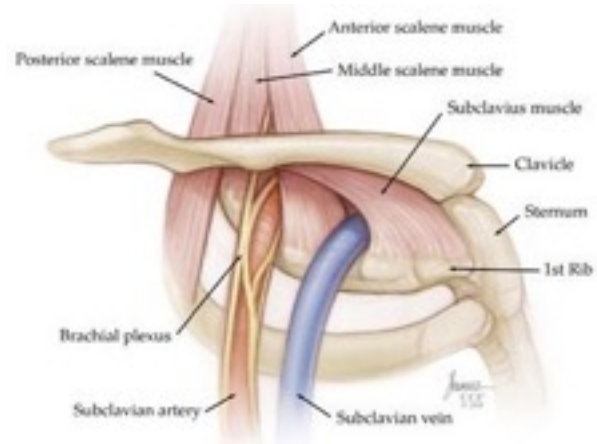
- enlarged muscles in the neck/shoulder area
- excessive weight gain
- poor posture
- pregnancy

While the majority of TOS cases are diagnosed between the ages of 20-50 years of age, TOS can occur in teenagers and sometimes even pediatric patients. Women are three to four times more likely to develop neurogenic TOS; those who work as computer programmers, secretaries, construction workers, factory workers, or have recently experienced a neck trauma (such as whiplash) are at a higher risk of developing this condition. In some cases, TOS can even be brought on due to certain anatomical defects, such as having an extra rib.

Thoracic outlet syndrome can be a painful and frustrating condition, especially when it inhibits a person's work or their daily activities. Diagnosing TOS can be challenging because the symptoms vary greatly among patients with the disorder depending on the location of the compression.

Those with this condition may experience:

- Muscle wasting in the fleshy base of the thumb
- Numbness or tingling in the arm or fingers
- Pain or aches in the neck, shoulder or hand
- Weakening grip
- Cold fingers, hands or arms
- Arm fatigue with activity



How Can Physical Therapy Help?

The good news is that it's treatable and **a majority of neurogenic TOS patients find relief through conservative treatment in physical therapy.** Proper management of TOS requires an understanding of the disorder's underlying causes. A comprehensive examination by a physical therapist can reveal bony and soft tissue abnormalities and mechanical dysfunctions contributing to an your TOS symptoms.

Your physical therapist will design a rehabilitation program that focuses on specific problems identified during your evaluation to develop a treatment plan that is specific to you. The goal is to ease discomfort and improve your ability to perform daily activities.



Using multiple techniques, your therapist will work to mobilize the tissues of the neck, shoulder, and arm. They'll instruct you on exercises that target specific areas of the upper arm, back, and neck to increase your strength and improve range of motion. In addition, your physical therapist can teach you strategies for helping minimize your symptoms while performing daily activities, placing less stress on the structures contributing to your TOS.