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Women may face higher risk for shoulder injury

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If women didn't have enough to worry about with bone loss, osteoporosis and bone fractures, it turns out they also tend to be more prone to shoulder injuries, according to Dr. Vivek Agrawal.

"Women tend to be more flexible than men, especially women 25 and younger," said Agrawal, a shoulder specialist who runs a center dedicated exclusively to shoulders in suburban Indianapolis. One study looking at 12-year-olds in Iceland found that girls were three times more likely to have hyper-mobile joints than boys the same age. Girls' more elastic body tissue, combined with a smaller muscle mass, puts a lot more stress on the shoulder ligaments and capsule, and over time the shoulder joint can become too loose and cause an unstable shoulder, according to Agrawal.

Other reports underscore the relationship between a woman's menstrual cycle and joint injuries. Levels of relaxin, the hormone responsible for loosening the pelvic ligaments to aid in childbirth, naturally increase with ovulation, making this a time when women playing sports are more prone to joint injuries, including the shoulder.

Changes in women's hormones during menopause also can affect the shoulder. Frozen shoulder, a stiff shoulder joint that makes simple activities very difficult and painful, affects more women between the ages of 40 to 60.

"Menopause is a time when more women experience a frozen shoulder than at other times in their lives," Agrawal said. "One theory is that the changes in a woman's hormones set off a cascade of events that contribute to a frozen shoulder."

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