



Shoulder dislocations - management



With WSC Doctor **Richard Tucker**.
Richard has been the Club Doctor for Central Districts Football Club for more than 20 years, as also currently serves the U/16 & U/18 State football teams.

Wakefield Sports Clinic talks with Richard about management of shoulder dislocations.

Wakefield Sports Clinic (WSC): As an experienced Sports Doctor, you've seen plenty of shoulder dislocations. What do you do?

Richard Tucker (RT): As with most dislocations, reducing it (putting it back in) as soon as possible is key. The longer it is out, the harder it will be to relocate.

WSC: Do you reduce it on the field?

RT: No. I escort the player safely to the change rooms before doing so. The SANFL/AFL don't want this procedure done in public and this is probably fair enough.

WSC: Can anyone reduce the shoulder?

RT: Definitely not, as unskilled attempts can potentially do more damage particularly if it is a first dislocation. Refer the player to a Sports Doctor immediately.

WSC: What about the player whose shoulder regularly pops out?

RT: Sometimes with 'loose shoulders', players and experienced trainers can relocate them quickly. This is not a good long-term option, though. An unstable shoulder joint can dislodge bone fragments and create dents in the head of the humerus acutely and eventually develop degenerative change.

WSC: So once you remove the injured player from the field and into the locker room, what then?

RT: I assess the neurovascular function of the player's arm, checking for pulse, feeling in the arm and hand, etc, in case there is any nerve damage, for instance. Then I will reduce the shoulder and recheck the neurovascular function.

WSC: What if the shoulder *doesn't* reduce?

RT: For trainers, send the player onto a Sports Doctor. If the Sports Doctor can't reduce it, the next option is for the shoulder to be relocated under general anaesthesia by a surgeon.

WSC: So the shoulder has been reduced. Now what?

RT: The usual acute treatment applies here. RICER no HARM. Later, the use of a swathe sling holding the arm to the body, or tucking the arm inside the jumper until they see the Sports Doctor for pain management options.

WSC: And in the longer-term?

RT: Any time a player dislocates their shoulder, the chances of recurrence are high unfortunately. The standardised rehab program from one of the WSC physios is recommended. There is some general debate now whether to opt for a more aggressive, surgical approach to head-off future problems. At present most players opt for conservative treatment rather than heading 'under the knife'. A sports doctor will be able to talk through options with the individual player.

WSC: What about getting back out on the field?

RT: I can understand the pressures to re-join the team, especially around finals time, but the player must be made aware of the very real threat of recurrence and long-term damage.

Wakefield Sports Clinic is responsible for the care of many of the nation's elite athletes, including players from the Adelaide Crows, Adelaide United, 36ERS, Netball SA, Olympic Teams and many more.