

Shoulder Dislocations

By Ben Benjamin, PhD

Question: Which tendon is stretched when the shoulder dislocates anteriorly?

Answer: The *subscapularis* tendon.

The subscapularis tendon, along with the joint capsule of the shoulder, helps to stabilize the front of the shoulder joint.

When the humerus dislocates anteriorly, the subscapularis tendon and the joint capsule stretch, allowing the head of the humerus to slip forward. If the shoulder dislocates posteriorly, the infraspinatus tendon is stretched and the head of the humerus slips backward. This causes the joint to become unstable because one of these tendons stretches and no longer supports the shoulder joint adequately.

When clients dislocate their shoulders, they remain prone to repeated dislocations because one of their tendons has become distended - similar to a rubber band you've had around an old box for years. When a tendon is stretched in this way it does not return to its original size. You may notice that clients who have had a history of shoulder dislocation are hesitant to put their bodies in certain positions.

For example, if a client dislocated anteriorly, he or she does not like you to take their arm overhead or rotate it laterally. This makes the person feel unstable and in danger of repeated dislocation. If the person has dislocated his or her shoulder several times, the individual will not like having his or her arm behind the back in a stretched position because this increases the likelihood of a dislocation by stretching the supporting tendons.

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