

# Spring Training for Pitchers

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**Spring brings the promise of longer days, warmer weather, baseball and other extracurricular activities. Major League Baseball gets in full swing, while community sandlots fill up as people gravitate outside in greater numbers. But with this comes an increased risk of sports-related injuries – for professional and amateur athletes alike.**

## *Biceps Tendinopathy in Throwing Athletes*

An injury to the biceps tendon where it attaches high in the shoulder is a very common one among throwing athletes, particularly baseball and softball pitchers. It is actually not a true inflammation (hence the term tendinopathy rather than tendinitis), which explains why anti-inflammatory medications, such as ibuprofen offer only little or no relief.

In overhead throwers, such as baseball pitchers, biceps tendinopathy is caused by “impingement” of the tendon during the overhead cocking and ball release phases of the throw, then again during the follow-through when the biceps contracts very strongly to decelerate extension of the elbow, which can reach a velocity 5,000 degrees per second!

For the softball pitcher, the same impingement and deceleration forces occur, along with the added stress of accelerating the ball just prior to ball release. Just because the windmill pitch is “underhand” doesn’t make it any less stressful than the overhead pitch.

How do you know if you have biceps tendinopathy? Usually it’s a pain in the front of the shoulder – not the biceps muscle belly – that may be accompanied by a “click” with overhead activity. Pain may be felt during any of the above phases of pitching, or even at rest if it is really irritated.

Like most athletic injuries, rest helps in recovery, but usually it’s not

enough. Treatment by a certified athletic trainer or sports physical therapist may be needed and should include deep friction massage to the long biceps tendon and, most importantly, strengthening of the biceps muscle using relatively heavy arm curl exercises.

Other problems in the shoulder also should be considered, and may include a rotator cuff injury or a tear of the shoulder labrum where the biceps tendon attaches. Again, a certified athletic trainer, sports physical therapist or sports medicine physician can help decide which problem you have.

Can biceps tendinopathy be prevented? Absolutely. The same heavy arm curl exercises that are used to treat biceps tendinopathy can be used to prevent the problem. Therefore, in addition to pre-season rotator cuff strengthening, throwing athletes should include plenty of biceps work in their routines.

## *Spring Training: It’s Not Just for the Pros*

May is National Physical Fitness and Sports Month, the perfect time to (re)evaluate your individual and team training practices, as well as (re)commit to a safer, healthier, more regimented lifestyle – on and off the field – that can help ensure you stay active longer.

Proper techniques to warm up and stretch prior to recreational and league sports activities are critical, as is drinking plenty of fluids and engaging in regular conditioning exercises that can prepare the body to better handle the hot and more strenuous summer months.

So next time, before dusting off that baseball mitt for a competitive (or even leisurely) game of catch, keep in mind important training and conditioning exercises star pitchers practice to avoid needless injuries...and not get benched for the rest of the season.