

Rib Fixations

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Probably, one of the most misdiagnosed injuries in athletes who lift or reach (swimmers, gymnasts) is the rib fixation. It is an extremely uncomfortable injury which is often confused with a "herniated disc" or "neck strain". Some athletes may go months in pain and discomfort if not properly attended to.

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The first rib is vulnerable to slight movement when the athlete is, for example, removing the bar from the racks prior to performing bench presses, to the gymnast who is exploding towards the mat during a floor routine. These individuals must pay very close attention to form in order to prevent possible catastrophe.

How Do you Know?

You may not know. Of course, I strongly urge the advice of a sports doctor whenever an athlete experiences pain, The pain from a fixated rib is usually "sharp" in nature. Because of the ribs involvement in breathing, patient often complain of the sharp pain during inspiration, coughing and even sneezing. At times, numbness and weakness is felt on the effected side arm, thumb and hand.

Unfortunately, the above symptoms are very similar to those of a "herniated" disc. So you begin to see how they may be confused. With the first rib fixation there may also be neck stiffness as well as headaches and muscle spasm.

A Quick Case History

A young football player presented to my office yesterday complaining of neck pain, with numbness in his left arm and hand. His mother, who had accompanied him into the exam room, told me they had gone to another doctor who prescribed some "pain killers". She also presented a set of MRIs of the neck which were also ordered by this doctor 2 weeks ago. The MRI showed no evidence of disc bulge only some minor degeneration. This obviously left the question " If its' not a disc problem, then what is it?".

After ruling out any other pathology that may be affecting the young athlete, I turned my attention to the ribs. It took approximately 5 minutes to find the rib which was causing the problem. The first rib on the left side had been fixated in the flexed position.

Fixing the Problem

Manipulating a first rib is a skill possessed by chiropractors. The technique, of course, must be performed accurately and with speed. The patient is laid faced down on the adjusting table and a quick thrust is applied to the rib from the superior to inferior while turning the patients head in a very specific way. When done correctly the treatment produces almost immediate results, with a cessation of pain and spasm.

Rib fixations are very common in the sports arena and must be addresses as commonly as are discs and other musculoskeletal injuries. Whiplash patients experience the same type of problem following accidents. And as, Emmit Smith, star running back for the Dallas Cowboys and chiropractic advocate, said during an interview, "Playing in a football game is like being in 2 or 3 Accidents".

If you are a young athlete with the pain, please remember to seek the advice of a sports doctor. And if you are a parent of an aspiring Emmit Smith, make sure that boy or girl is being taken care of properly.

