

```html

If you've ever woken up with a nagging ache in your shoulder after a vigorous session of pickleball, you're not alone. Many players—especially those over 40—report **rotator cuff irritation** that becomes most noticeable when lying [sarasotamagazine.com](https://sarasotamagazine.com) on the affected side. The frustration is real: you finish a great game, then struggle to find a comfy sleep position that doesn't aggravate the pain.



As someone who plays morning pickleball twice a week (and yes, I count my warm-up minutes out loud), I've spent nearly a decade interviewing orthopaedists, physical therapists, and recreational athletes to understand these kinds of issues. Here's what I've learned—and what you can do about it.



*Photo credit: Brendan Sapp / Unsplash*

## Why Does Shoulder Pain Often Flare Up at Night?

Let's start by addressing why the shoulder ache seems worse when you lie on that sore side. The culprit is typically **rotator cuff irritation**. The rotator cuff, a group of small muscles and tendons, stabilizes your shoulder joint but is vulnerable to overuse. When irritated, these tendons become inflamed, and pressure during sleep — especially on that side — compresses the area, causing sharp or dull pain.

Commonly, this **rotator cuff irritation** shows two hallmark symptoms:

- **Night pain:** The shoulder throbs or aches when you lie down or try to fall asleep.
- **Restricted behind-the-back reach:** Simple motions like tucking in your shirt or reaching behind you become limited or painful.

Sound familiar? This pattern often emerges gradually, not from a single traumatic injury.

## It's Not Usually One Big Incident — Overuse and Frequency Matter More

People often come to me convinced their shoulder pain stems from one awkward swing or a "bad hit" during pickleball. However, the evidence from medical experts and experienced physical therapists points elsewhere. What really drives these overuse injuries is how often and how intensely you play. *Repeated stress without adequate recovery*, not a single dramatic moment, is the real problem.

A key question I always ask: **"What changed in the last two weeks?"** Did you suddenly add an extra session? Or maybe the games became more competitive, with longer rallies and fewer breaks? These small tweaks stack up,

especially as your tendons age.

## Aging Tendons Don't Bounce Back Like They Used To

Let's be honest: our bodies aren't as quick to repair after 40 or 50 as they were in our 20s. Aging tendons adapt more slowly and tolerate sudden loads less well. What once was a simple warm-up might now require extra care. When the rotator cuff and surrounding tendons take multiple pounding sessions with minimal rest, microdamage accumulates and inflammation develops.

That's why it's crucial to respect your body's signals and not push through early pain warnings. Overuse in the wrong dose leads to lingering flare-ups, especially at night.

## Elbow Pain Often Tags Along: Why the Grip and Mechanics Matter

Another common complaint I hear from players is elbow pain, often alongside shoulder irritation. Orthopaedists and PTs agree that stern grip tension and arm-dominant swing mechanics are frequent culprits. Holding the paddle too tightly or relying excessively on your arm rather than your whole body transfers strain to the elbow tendons, causing irritation on top of the shoulder issues.

### Tips to Reduce Elbow and Shoulder Stress:

1. Loosen your grip: Keep it firm but relaxed to avoid unnecessary tension.
2. Engage your core and legs to generate power instead of overusing your arm.
3. Stretch gently after play, focusing on forearm and shoulder mobility.

## What Helps When You Have Shoulder Pain Lying on That Side?

After speaking with pro orthopaedists and players alike, here are consistent strategies that help relieve night pain and promote healing.

### 1. Sleep Position Adjustments

- **Use a supportive pillow:** A pillow that cushions your shoulder and neck well can reduce direct pressure on irritated tendons.
- **Try sleeping on your back or opposite side:** Avoid lying on the painful shoulder whenever possible.
- **Place a pillow under your arm:** This keeps the shoulder joint aligned and reduces strain.
- **Consider a body pillow:** Hugging a long pillow can prevent rolling onto the painful side.

### 2. Warm-Up and Gentle Stretching

As someone who counts warm-up minutes out loud before pickleball, I can't stress enough the importance of your first 8 minutes on court. This is essential for tendon health. Start with light range-of-motion exercises and dynamic stretches focusing on the shoulder to boost circulation.



### 3. Targeted Physical Therapy and Exercises

Orthopaedists and PTs recommend strengthening the rotator cuff and scapular muscles gently, improving shoulder mechanics and reducing irritation. A clinician can prescribe tailored exercises after assessing your shoulder.

### 4. Pain Management and Natural Remedies

For those interested in natural relief options, Joy Organics offers organic CBD gummies that many athletes use to manage inflammation and discomfort without harsh pharmaceuticals. While not a replacement for professional care, these can complement your recovery and improve sleep quality.

### 5. When to See a Clinician

If shoulder pain persists beyond a couple of weeks despite adjusting sleep positions and activity levels, or if you experience:

- Severe night pain that disrupts sleep regularly
- Significant restriction in shoulder motion (behind-the-back reach notably limited)
- Weakness or numbness down the arm

It's time to **see a clinician** for a thorough assessment and personalized treatment plan. Early intervention can prevent minor irritation from becoming chronic tendinopathy or a full rotator cuff tear.

## Summary Table: What Helps Pickleball Shoulder Pain When Lying on the Side

Cause Symptom What Helps Rotator cuff irritation from overuse Night pain; limited behind-the-back reach

- Sleep on opposite side or back
- Supportive pillows under arm/neck
- Gentle stretching and warm-up
- Physical therapy exercises

- Natural anti-inflammatory aids (e.g., Joy Organics organic CBD gummies)

Elbow inflammation due to tight grip and arm-dominant swings Elbow ache alongside shoulder pain

- Loosen paddle grip
- Improve full-body mechanics
- Stretch forearm muscles

Aging tendons with slower adaptation Increased soreness after sudden extra sessions

- Increase rest and recovery days
- Gradual ramp-up of play intensity
- Consistent warm-up (first 8 minutes count!)

## Final Thoughts

Remember, shoulder pain doesn't have to bench you from the pickleball court. By adjusting your sleep position, respecting your tendons' time to recover, and using smart warm-ups and mechanics, you can keep your shoulder healthy and enjoy many matches ahead. If pain persists, don't hesitate to see a clinician who can guide your recovery.

And for anyone interested in natural relief supplements, check out Joy Organics and their organic CBD gummies—they might just become your new off-court ally.

Until next time, I'll be counting those warm-up minutes out loud, paddle bag ready with my trusty light resistance band—because in pickleball, prevention is better than cure!

...