

Winged Scapula.

What is a winged scapula?

A winged scapula is a shoulder condition or injury in which the scapula or shoulder blade sticks out at the back (See Figure 1). It is most common in teenagers and younger players.

What are the symptoms?

In the majority of cases, there is no specific injury or accident that occurs to cause a player to have a winging of the scapular or shoulder blade. Usually, the winging scapula develops over time, often as the player grows. The player may notice pain and limited shoulder movement and have difficulty in lifting weights.



Figure 1: Winged Scapula.

What causes a winged scapula?

The main causes of a winged scapula are: i) postural, in which the player develops the winged scapula over time and ii) damage to the long thoracic nerve of the shoulder and/or weakness in the serratus anterior muscle. If the long thoracic nerve is damaged, it can cause “paralysis” of the serratus anterior muscle and winging of the shoulder blade. The initial damage to the nerve is rarely caused by a collision to the shoulder while playing soccer.



Figure 2: Poor Posture.

What can a sports injury professional do?



A player who exhibits a winging scapula should seek professional advice from a sports injury professional. A physiotherapist will prescribe a rehabilitation programme to strengthen the shoulder muscles - in particular the serratus anterior muscle. Advice on posture will also be given to help correct the problem (See Figure 2). If treatment does not help and the winging scapula is the result of an accident then a sports physician may have to refer the player to an orthopaedic surgeon for treatment. Almost always a winging scapula responds well to strengthening, postural correction and physiotherapy.