

Dallas Orthopedic Surgeon Warns Delayed Shoulder Treatment Leads to Worse Outcomes and Fewer Options

Dr. Thornton says the weeks spend hoping shoulder pain will sort itself out are often the weeks that decide whether they heal or live with permanent limitation.



Steven J. Thornton, MD

DALLAS, TX, UNITED STATES, June 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Dr. Steven

J. Thornton, MD, a board-certified orthopedic surgeon and fellowship-trained sports medicine specialist based in Dallas, is alerting the greater Dallas-Fort Worth community to the risks of delaying treatment for shoulder injuries. According to Dr. Thornton, patients who adjust their daily habits to work around shoulder pain, rather than seeking evaluation, frequently allow treatable conditions to progress to the point where simpler, less invasive options are no longer available.

A 2024 systematic review published in JBJS Open Access found that more than half of full-thickness rotator cuff tears continued to enlarge over an average of approximately three years, with tears that became painful progressing at significantly higher rates than those that remained asymptomatic.

"The shoulder is the most mobile joint in the body, which is also what makes it the easiest to ignore," said Dr. Thornton. "You can work around a bad shoulder for a long time. The problem is that working around it is not the same as healing it. While you are compensating, the underlying injury is often getting worse, and the window where I can give you the simplest, most durable fix is closing."

Dr. Thornton notes that untreated rotator cuff tears can retract, weaken, and develop fatty infiltration, a change that does not reverse even after successful surgical repair. Recurrent dislocations cause cumulative tissue damage that can convert a straightforward stabilization into a complex reconstruction. Frozen shoulder identified early can often be resolved without surgery; left untreated, the same condition may restrict motion for a year or more.

Dr. Thornton emphasizes that early consultation does not lead automatically to surgery. Many shoulder conditions in his practice are managed through physical therapy, activity modification,

and image-guided treatment. Timely evaluation is intended to establish an accurate diagnosis while the full range of treatment options, including non-surgical ones, remains available.

"The point of coming in early is not to rush toward the operating room," Dr. Thornton said. "It is to find out what is actually happening before the body locks in habits that cause more harm."

Dr. Thornton encourages patients to seek evaluation for pain that disrupts sleep or prevents lying on the affected side, weakness when lifting or reaching overhead, a shoulder that has dislocated even once, progressive stiffness or loss of range of motion, and pain that has persisted for more than two weeks without improvement.

About Dr. Steven J. Thornton, MD

Dr. Steven J. Thornton is a board-certified orthopedic surgeon and fellowship-trained sports medicine specialist serving Dallas, Plano, Frisco, McKinney, and the greater Dallas–Fort Worth area. His fellowship training included time at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York. He holds membership in the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine, and the Arthroscopy Association of North America. Named to D Magazine's Best Doctors list in 2024 and 2025, Dr. Thornton specializes in minimally invasive treatment of the shoulder, knee, hip, and elbow, with a 4.9-star rating across more than 560 patient reviews.

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