

If you play pickleball or any racquet sport regularly, you've probably felt it—the dreaded jab of shoulder pain after that first hard serve. It's tempting to blame the paddle, the serve speed, or even the opponent's spin. But through nearly a decade covering orthopaedists, physical therapists, and rec-league stories, I've learned that the real culprit lies deeper: how well your shoulder is prepared for play.



Let me tell you about a situation I encountered wished they had known this beforehand.. In today's post, we'll unpack what causes that "cold shoulder" sensation on your early serves, why aging tendons demand more care, and practical strategies—like soft dinking warm ups, arm circles before play, and band external rotations—to keep you serving strong pain-free. Along the way, I'll mention some smart supports like Joy Organics organic CBD gummies and share tips to spot early warning signs of trouble.

Why the 'First Hard Serve' Hurts So Much

It's tempting to think: "I just took one bad swing and now my shoulder aches." But researchers and orthopaedists alike will tell you that *overuse and frequency drive injuries more than single dramatic moments*. The first hard serve on a cold shoulder is often the symptom, not the cause.

Aging Tendons and Their Changing Limits

Here's a little secret from the bench conversations and PT offices: as we age, our tendons adapt slower and tolerate sudden loads less well. The quick explosive serve that didn't trouble you in your 20s can hit differently when you're pushing 50 and beyond. Tendons lose elasticity, circulation slows, and microtears add up unnoticed until one decisive moment of strain amplifies the pain.

Common Injuries to Watch For

- **Rotator cuff irritation:** This often shows up as nagging night pain or difficulty reaching behind your back—classic signs that you shouldn't ignore.
- **Elbow pain:** Often stems from a tight grip and arm-dominant mechanics rather than the shoulder itself.

By paying attention to these warning signs, you can adjust your mechanics or recovery strategies before they sideline you.

Soft Dinking Warm Up: The Game Changer

Consistency is king when it comes to injury prevention. One of the simplest, most effective ways to prepare your shoulder for serve-speed dynamics is through a proper **soft dinking warm up**. This means starting your session with light, [physical therapy for rotator cuff](#) controlled paddle taps near the net that gradually increase your shoulder's blood flow and mobility over 8-10 minutes.

I always count warm-up minutes out loud during my morning pickleball sessions—some players try to squeeze into a game without this crucial prep and quickly regret it. Don't be that player.

Why Soft Dinks Help

- Reduce sudden tendon strain by incrementally increasing load.
- Enhance neuromuscular coordination for smooth shoulder mechanics.
- Allow your aging tendons to "wake up" gradually.

Arm Circles Before Play: Don't Skip Them!

After soft dinking, I recommend light **arm circles before play**—forward and backward circles done slowly with control. This simple exercise lubricates the shoulder joint, promotes optimal blood flow, and even helps calm nervous system tension that contributes to poor swing mechanics.

Taking 2-3 minutes for arm circles complements your warm up and sets you up for safer plays

Band External Rotations: Strengthen the Rotator Cuff

One of the most overlooked yet crucial exercises in shoulder health is the **band external rotation**. Using a light resistance band—something I keep in my paddle bag—you engage the often-neglected muscles stabilizing the rotator cuff, critical for handling serve speeds without pain.

1. Anchor a resistance band at elbow height.
2. Keep your elbow tucked to your side at 90 degrees.
3. Rotate your forearm outward, away from your body, slowly and controlled.
4. Repeat 2 sets of 15 reps, increasing resistance gradually over weeks.

This exercise improves shoulder stability, reduces irritation, and can be easily done as a quick pre-game ritual or recovery routine.

Don't Ignore Night Pain and Reach Limitations

Night pain or difficulty reaching behind your back is often an early sign that your rotator cuff is irritated. Many players push through, thinking inflammation or soreness will pass, but catching these signs early means you can avoid a painful setback.

One useful recovery aid I've discovered through interviews with ortho docs is Joy Organics organic CBD gummies, which some players swear by to soothe inflammation and improve sleep quality. While not a miracle fix, integrating

CBD products can support your recovery routine alongside proper warm-up and strengthening practices.

Avoiding Elbow Pain: Loosen Your Grip

Elbow pain, particularly on your serving arm, often has less to do with the shoulder and more to do with grip tightness and arm-dominant mechanics. Players who grip the paddle like it's a life raft tend to overload the forearm muscles, leading to irritation akin to tennis elbow.

Try consciously loosening your grip during play. Pay attention to how your arm feels after every serve. Combine this with proper shoulder warm-ups and strengthen using band work, and you're less likely to develop elbow symptoms.

Paddle Doesn't Cause Tendonitis—Your Prep Does

I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "My paddle is the problem" after a shoulder or elbow flare-up. Here's the truth: no paddle causes tendonitis. It's the cumulative effects of poor warm-up, skipped rehab, and overuse. Don't fall for miracle-fix language promising a switch to the "perfect paddle" as a cure.

Instead, invest your time in consistent warm-up routines like soft dinking, arm circles, band external rotations, and recovery strategies—including professional advice, quality sleep, and yes, even natural supplements like Joy Organics organic CBD gummies.

Summary Table: Pre-Play and Recovery Checklist

Step	Action	Benefit	Duration/Frequency
1	Soft Dinking Warm Up	Prepares tendons, improves blood flow, incremental load	8-10 minutes before play
2	Arm Circles (forward and backward)	Lubricates shoulder joint, reduces tension	2-3 minutes before play
3	Band External Rotations	Strengthens rotator cuff, improves stability	2 sets of 15 reps daily or pre-game
4	Grip Relaxation Techniques	Reduces forearm/elbow stress	Throughout play
5	Recovery Aids (e.g., Joy Organics organic CBD gummies)	Supports inflammation relief and recovery	As directed, post-play or nightly

Final Thoughts: What Changed in the Last Two Weeks?

You know what's funny? before you lace up or grab your paddle, always ask yourself, "what changed in the last two weeks?" did your playing frequency increase? are you feeling more tired or sore? did you skip your usual warm-up or strengthening exercises? often, recognizing these changes early allows you to adjust and avoid the dreaded cold shoulder sensation on your first hard serve.

Keep your routine consistent, don't underestimate your warm-up, and use smart recovery aids thoughtfully. Your shoulder—and your game—will thank you.

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