

Traumatic Shoulder Injury

Information and Exercise Leaflet for Patients and Carers

Your shoulder can be injured by lifting heavy objects, falling onto it or a wrenching injury for example grabbing a rail to prevent a fall. You may feel sharp pain or aching that can feel close to the joint or deep inside the shoulder.

As you get older, normal wear and tear can mean that even a small incident can cause a flare up of pain.

Symptoms

Pain is commonly caused during reaching and lifting, lying onto your injured shoulder and getting out of the car / chair.

Pain is often sharp to begin with but will commonly turn to an ache within 10 days. You may have pain and restriction but if this is significantly limited please seek medical attention (see 'should I get medical attention section below').

Causes

There are many ligaments, muscles and tendons that can get injured during a fall or wrench to the shoulder.

Should I get medical attention?

Please go to A+E or speak to your GP if you have any of the following symptoms:

- You cannot lift your arm away from your side
- Your joint feels deformed or out of place or your shoulder blade sticks out
- You are unable to put weight through your arm
- You developed large amounts of swelling immediately after your injury.
- Numbness or pins and needles in your arm/hand

Only continue to read if you have none of the above symptoms.

Should I be resting or moving?

Recent Injury - For the first 24 to 72 hours

- Try to rest your shoulder but avoid long spells of not moving at all.
- Try to move your shoulder gently for 30 seconds every hour when you are awake.

After 72 hours

- You should try to use your shoulder more
- Try and do whatever you would normally do and stay or return to work.
- Avoid sports or heavy lifting until you have less pain and good movement
- Avoid lifting with the elbow away from the body

Should I take pain killers?

- Pain killers can help you keep moving. However, it is important to discuss this with your GP, especially if you are taking other medication.

Should I use ice or heat?

- If you have recently injured or you have any swelling in the shoulder then wrap crushed ice or a bag of frozen peas in a damp towel and hold it for 10 to 15 minutes against the part that hurts. You can do this every two to three hours. Make sure you use a damp towel between the ice and your skin to avoid ice burns.
- Alternatively you could try gel packs, which do a similar job.
- Some people find that heat is more relaxing. This is not recommended if you have injured your shoulder within the last 7 days but if you have had a recent flare up of an old shoulder problem then you could use a hot water bottle or heat pad. Make sure it is not too hot and doesn't directly touch your skin. You can use this for 10-15 minutes, three to four times a day.

What about work?

- You will recover faster and everybody will benefit if you can stay at or get back to work as early as possible. Do not worry if your shoulder still hurts, as you may only have to do light work at first. Speak to your manager or occupational health team about how to go about this. Try to stay active and keep moving gently.

What about sports?

- You should take time before returning to any sports after a shoulder injury.
- If you take part in sport too soon you could get injured again.
- You should have no swelling and be able to move your shoulder fully.
- You should have full or close to full strength and be able to take weight through your arm and lift normally.
- Remember to warm up and stretch before sports.

Warning Signs

If you have severe pain which is getting worse over several weeks, if you are unwell or under the age of 16 years, you should consult your doctor.

The following symptoms are very rare, but if you suddenly develop any of them, you should consult your doctor straightaway.

- Significant swelling to the arm not just the shoulder
- Feeling generally unwell
- Signs of infection i.e. night sweats that are out of the ordinary, high temperature and feeling unwell.
- Constant night pain (unable to rest/sleep)
- Unexplained weight loss

If your symptoms fail to improve within 6 weeks with this regime you should contact your doctor for a physiotherapy referral.

If this is the case remember to bring vest top/t-shirt to change in to, this will help the physiotherapist diagnose your problem.

Shoulder Exercises

- The aim of these exercises is to help you regain normal movement
- Start with x 5 of each – gradually increase by 1 or 2 each day
- Try to exercise at least x three times a day



Stop these exercises if you feel they are:

- Making your symptoms worse
- Bringing on new pain



Stand leaning with your good arm supporting.

Let your other arm hang relaxed, straight down. Swing your arm:

1. Forwards and Backwards
2. Across your chest, left to right
3. Swing your arm as though drawing a circle

Repeat ___ times, as pain allows



Sit or stand. Place your hands on a table with a towel underneath.

Slide your hands along the table as far as you can, without lifting your shoulders.

Repeat ___ times, as pain allows.



Place your forearm on a table on a towel, keep your shoulder back.

Slide your forearm out to the side.

Repeat ___ times, as pain allows.



Stand with arms behind your back and hold one hand.

Slide your hand up along your back.

Repeat ___ times, as pain allows.

Integrated Musculoskeletal Service

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