

Information for patients

# Self Help for Frozen Shoulder



## Hand and Upper Limb

## What is a Frozen Shoulder?

The shoulder joint is a ball in socket joint and the joint is surrounded by a structure called a joint capsule. The joint capsule is usually very mobile and flexible, moving freely as you move your arm. A frozen shoulder is when the joint capsule becomes inflamed, thickened and stiff, subsequently causing pain and loss of movement at the shoulder joint. A frozen shoulder is also described as adhesive capsulitis, the stiff shoulder and a contracted shoulder.

### Contributing Factors

- Most commonly occurs between 40-60 years of age
- Diabetes
- Can happen after surgery or injury
- Can come for no apparent reason

### Things to look out for and seek medical attention

- A new lump or bump around the shoulder
- Bruising or redness in and around the joint or new swellings in other joints
- Feeling unwell with a temperature associated with the onset of this problem
- Loss of feeling and power in the arm
- Power loss associated with trauma or a fall onto an outstretched hand
- Unusual increase in breathlessness, or new persistent cough since the onset of this problem

## Symptoms

Symptoms can vary in intensity and usually start with pain all around the shoulder and sometimes down the arm. You will notice a restriction in your shoulder movement and may have difficulty with activities.

## What to expect

The frozen shoulder is a self-limiting condition, meaning it usually goes away by itself with time. Timescales associated with resolution of your symptoms range between 2-5 years. Physiotherapy can help to speed this up with stretching exercises or other treatments, providing the pain is well controlled. Often a corticosteroid injection in the early stages can help to manage your pain and enable you to perform your exercises. Discuss this with your doctor. In some severe cases surgery may be indicated, if your symptoms fail to respond to conservative measures.

## Management

- Ensure you keep your shoulder as mobile as possible, using your arm as much as you can to help with your daily activities. The main principle of treatment is to stretch out the shoulder.
- Adequately control your pain. Pain stops you being able to move the arm and may result in the shoulder becoming more restricted (Speak to a pharmacist about pain management).
- You could use heat to help with the pain and healing, ensuring that you do not apply directly to the skin. Do not use too frequently or for prolonged periods of time as these treatments can burn you. Packs that are safe can be purchased in your local pharmacy e.g. Curaheat or ThermaCare
- Try to maintain a good posture

## Exercises






Diagram	Explanation
	<p>Lying on your back with elbows against your body and at a right angle. Hold a stick in your hands.</p> <p>Move the stick sideways thus pushing the arm to be exercised outwards.</p> <p>Repeat 10 times</p>
	<p>Stand with arms behind your back. Grasp the wrist of the arm you want to exercise.</p> <p>Slide your hands up the back.</p> <p>Repeat 10 times</p>
	<p>Stand with your legs hip width apart and lean your upper trunk forward. Rest hands on surface.</p> <p>Gently let the upper trunk drop down until you can feel stretching in your sides and chest muscles. Keep arms straight and stretch for approx. 5 secs.</p> <p>Repeat 10 times</p>
	<p>Stand leaning on a table with one hand.</p> <p>Let your other arm hang relaxed straight down. Swing your arm as if drawing a circle on the floor. Change direction.</p> <p>Repeat 10 times</p>
	<p>Sitting or standing.</p> <p>Move your neck by turning your head to look over each shoulder.</p> <p>Move your neck by tilting the head to the side in both directions.</p> <p>Repeat 10 times</p>

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### Am I damaging my shoulder?

You will not damage your shoulder by performing routine daily chores, stretches and tasks as best as you can tolerate, the pain with a frozen shoulder does not usually indicate any harm.

### Do I need any investigations?

There is no specific test to help diagnose a frozen shoulder but occasionally your GP or physiotherapist may request further investigations, such as an X-Ray.

### Is it OK to drive?

Yes, however you must decide yourself if you are safe, e.g can perform an emergency stop.

### Is it OK to work?

Yes, we recommend you continue with your normal activities as much as possible.

## If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print. Arrangements can also be made on request for it to be explained in your preferred language. Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) email: [rjah.pals.office@nhs.net](mailto:rjah.pals.office@nhs.net)

### Feedback

Tell us what you think of our patient information leaflet. Please send your comments to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) email: [rjah.pals.office@nhs.net](mailto:rjah.pals.office@nhs.net)

Date of publication: April 2024

Date of review: April 2027

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