



Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy
Information for patients

Shoulder Pain

Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide you with some general advice about how to manage your shoulder pain and some simple exercises.

Shoulder Pain

Shoulder pain is very common and usually affects the muscles, tendons and ligaments that surround the shoulder. Most shoulder pain is not serious and does not require a scan or x-ray to diagnose the problem. The pain can often be felt in the outside of the upper arm rather than the joint itself.

The Shoulder Joint

The shoulder joint is a ball and socket joint. The round end of the upper arm bone (humerus) fits into the shallow socket (glenoid) on the shoulder blade (scapula).

The shoulder joint is designed to give a large amount of movement. There are various structures that help to keep the joint in position: ligaments, muscles and a joint capsule.

Conditions affecting the shoulder

Shoulder problems are common and can be caused by movements such as taking off your coat, lifting something awkwardly, taking part in sport and a trip or a fall. Additionally, as you get older, normal wear and tear can cause your shoulder problem to flare up now and again, often for no reason.

Most shoulder pain should resolve in time following painkillers, advice and by carrying out some simple exercises and may not require any additional treatment from a doctor or a physiotherapist. However, it can take from a few weeks to several months to settle.

You should seek urgent medical advice if any of the following applies to you:

- If you have had an injury to your shoulder that has caused pain and weakness or difficulty with lifting your arm up.
- You have noticed any unusual lump or swelling around the neck, shoulder or arm.
- You have hot red skin in the region of pain, have a fever or are starting to feel unwell since your shoulder pain started.
- You have had a injury to the shoulder that has led to your shoulder having a different appearance or shape.
- You have pain that is getting worse or not improving despite taking painkillers and doing the recommended exercises, or you have pain that is so severe that it prevents you from doing the exercises.

Advice

Try to relieve the pain

Painkillers are useful in the short term in order to break the pain cycle. There are many pain relieving medications that may help. Your GP or pharmacist can advise you on what to take. Some people find that applying a cold in the first few days after injury can help. After a few days, warmth may be helpful.

Change activities that make your symptoms worse

Changing how you move can significantly help to reduce pain and allow the irritated structures to settle down. It is often easier and less painful if you use your arms close to your body and avoid lifting objects at arm's length. When raising your arm, keep your elbow bent and in front of your body or assist the arm using your opposite hand.

Posture

Try to maintain good posture most of the time. This reduces the strain on the shoulder muscles and ligaments.



Positioning

Supporting the sore shoulder can help to reduce pain.

When lying in bed, try lying on your opposite side, placing a pillow behind you and hugging a pillow with the sore arm. This can help prevent rolling onto the sore shoulder or sleeping awkwardly.



Alternatively, lying on your back with a pillow under your arm may help to support the shoulder.



When sitting, it is often comfortable to have the arm resting on a pillow / cushion in a relaxed posture.

Keeping moving

Moving and using the sore shoulder within a comfortable range of movement helps to prevent stiffness and improves circulation to the area. The exercises below may be a good place to start. They can be done regularly during the day.

Exercises

You may feel some mild discomfort during these exercises but overall your shoulder pain should not increase while you are doing the exercises and after you have finished doing them. Stop the exercises if you feel they make your symptoms worse or bring on more pain.



1. Lean forwards with support. Allow the arm to hang freely and swing in all directions for 30 seconds.



2. Stand with legs apart, hands on a table. Walk away from table letting upper trunk drop forwards. Repeat x 10



3. Gently roll your shoulders upwards and then backwards for 5-10 seconds. Let your shoulders then rest comfortably in a neutral position.



4. Stand with the palms of your hands flat on a table top. Slide your hands forward and back along a smooth surface such as a table top. You can use a towel under your hands to allow easy movement.

How often should I exercise?

Try to exercise about 3-4 times a day. Be guided by your pain.

When your shoulder symptoms are improving, you may wish to follow the exercises in the following leaflet which can be found in the web link below.

http://ns1.bess.org.uk/application/files/4215/0585/9025/BESS_Helpsheet_Shoulder_Pain_WEB.pdf



For further information

Please ring our Booking Office on **0191 4452643** or visit our website at: **www.tims.nhs.uk** which provides online guidance and support on managing your musculoskeletal (MSK) condition effectively.

The NHS website also provides trusted online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare to help you manage your condition and/or inform your choices about your health: **www.nhs.uk**

Feedback

We also welcome feedback from patients about their experiences with our service and this can be done through our patient advice and liaison (PALS) team on **0800 032 0202** or **northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk**

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Tyneside Integrated Musculoskeletal Service

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