

# Frozen Shoulder (Adhesive Capsulitis)

## Advice and Exercises

### What is a frozen shoulder?

'Frozen shoulder' is the commonly used name for 'adhesive capsulitis'; a painful restriction in the capsule (soft tissues) surrounding the shoulder joint.

### What are the symptoms?

There are three main phases of frozen shoulder. Symptoms can last from a few months to up to 3 years. Most frozen shoulder recover on their own.

1. Painful phase (may last 2 to 9 months) Pain often starts on the outside of the upper arm gradually and builds with time. Movements of the shoulder begin to reduce.
2. Stiff phase (may last 4 to 12 months) Shoulder movements become increasingly stiff and difficult, particularly twisting movements such as reaching behind the back or head.
3. Recovery phase (may last 5 to 26 months) Pain and stiffness in the shoulder starts to resolve and settle. Use and movement of the shoulder become easier.

### Causes

A primary frozen shoulder occurs when the cause is unknown. It is more common in people with diabetes and/or with a thyroid gland problem. Women are more commonly affected men.

A secondary frozen shoulder can occur if the shoulder has been kept still for a prolonged period of time, for example following injury or surgery.

### Pain Management

#### Painkillers

If your GP or pharmacist has prescribed pain killers, then these should be taken at the recommended dose.

#### Hot or Cold Packs

Gentle heat (hot water bottle) can help reduce muscle spasm and pain. A cold pack (ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can produce short-term relief. Use whichever pack you find the most helpful. Apply to the sore area for up to 20 minutes, every 2 hours.

## Exercises

If you have used ice, allow 30 minutes before exercising. Complete 2-3 times per day

1. Stand leaning on a table with the arm to be exercised hanging relaxed down. Swing your arm forward and backwards (a), left and right (b), and round in circles (c). Repeat 5-10 movements in each direction.



2. Stand or sit. Drop a towel/scarf over your shoulder using your unaffected arm. Hold the other end with the arm to be exercised up as far as possible. Hold approximately 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times



3. Lying on your back with your hands behind your neck and elbows pointing toward the ceiling. Move elbows apart and down to touch the floor. Repeat 5-



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