

## Subacromial Pain / Shoulder Impingement Advice and Exercises

### What causes impingement?

This usually occurs due to irritation or inflammation of the bursa (a soft tissue cushion) at the front of the shoulder. Sometimes the tendons (where the muscles attach to the bone) are also affected. It is often linked with repeated overhead activities, overuse, and poor posture.

### What are the symptoms?

- Pain that comes and goes
- The pain can be made worse by certain movements including reaching forwards and up, and reaching behind your back.
- Difficulty sleeping on the affected side due to pain.
- Pain referring from the neck

### How long will it take to recover?

Healing from soft tissue injuries normally takes about six weeks, though everyone recovers from injuries at different rates.

The pain usually starts to settle within a few days.

The majority of simple strains do not cause lasting problems, as the body is very good at healing itself.

### What treatment can I use?

#### Pain killers

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

#### Rest

Try and rest the arm for the first 24-72 hours. However, it is important to maintain flexibility in the arm so gently move it without causing too much pain. This will ensure your arm does not become too stiff and it will help with the healing process.

#### Ice

Wrap an ice pack in a damp towel and place over the shoulder. Use for up to 20 minutes every 2 hours. This will help reduce the swelling and pain.

### Early movement and exercises

- In the early stages it is best to avoid the activities that aggravate the pain. However, it is important to keep the shoulder moving to prevent stiffness.
- Do not rest for long periods at a time as this will lead to stiffness and weakness and prolong your recovery.
- Simple, graded exercises can be performed to help gain full function of your shoulder.

### Exercises for your shoulder

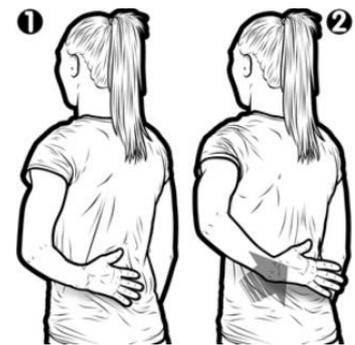
Supporting yourself on a table, lean forward and let your arm hang down loosely. Generating movement from your hips, gently swing your arm in small clockwise and anti-clockwise circles.



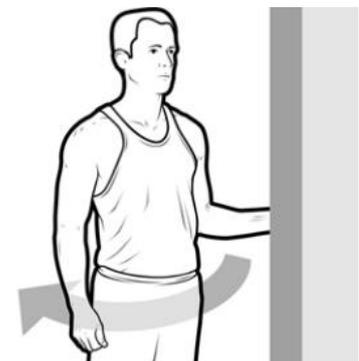
Lie on your back with a pillow under your head. Raise your injured arm vertically, using your opposite arm to assist if necessary. Remove your assisting arm and keep your elbow straight as you gently move your arm backwards and forwards in a small arc. Continue for up to 5 minutes or until fatigue.



Place your hand against the small of your back with your shoulder blade in a neutral position. Raise your hand off your back as far as you comfortably can and hold this position for 5 seconds. Lower and repeat.



Place your wrist against a door frame with your elbow bent to 90° and tucked in against your side. Slowly rotate your body away until you feel a stretch in your shoulder. Hold.



Exercise Illustrations: © TheRehabLab

### **What should I do if the pain increases with exercise?**

If your pain gets worse, initially reduce your exercises. As your shoulder starts to feel better you can gradually start exercising again.

However, if your pain increases significantly stop the exercises and consult your GP or physiotherapist before continuing.

### **General Advice**

- Keep your shoulder gently moving, but avoid activities that aggravate your pain.
- The sooner you commence early exercise, the better your recovery.
- Don't keep your shoulder still, it will get stiff and healing will take longer.
- Be aware of your posture. Try and keep your shoulders pulled backwards and avoiding excessive hunching forwards

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