

Shoulder Pain Advice and Exercises

What causes shoulder pain?

The most common cause is injury to the muscle, ligaments or tendons.

It can be caused by overstretching; this stretches and weakens the soft tissues that provide stability to the shoulder.

It can also be caused by overuse, irritating the soft tissue causing local areas of inflammation and swelling.

What are the symptoms?

- Pain
- Reduced Movement
- Stiffness
- Swelling

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?

Painkillers

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

Cold Packs

A cold pack (ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can also provide short-term relief. Apply to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every few hours.

Rest

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

Early Movement and Exercise

- Simple exercises can be performed to help restore the movement in your shoulder.
- Getting stiff muscles and joints moving is often uncomfortable to start with, but becomes much easier as you regain flexibility.

Exercises for your shoulder

Exercise 1

Stand leaning on a table with your good hand, let your injured arm hang relaxed straight down:

1. Swing your arm forwards and backwards



2. Swing your arm in circles, clockwise and anti-clockwise



3. Swing your arm from side to side



Exercise 2

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.



Exercise Illustrations: © TheRehabLab

Please note: these exercises should not increase your pain. Perform each exercise gently and slowly, only moving as far as feels comfortable. Practice each exercise up to 10 times, 2-3 times daily.

What should I do if the pain increases with exercise?

- If your pain gets worse, initially reduce the exercises. As your shoulder starts to feel better you can gradually start exercising again.
- 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.
- Pace your activities throughout the day to avoid flare-ups.
- Don't keep your shoulder still, it will get stiff and healing will take longer.

Please visit our website for information on how to access your local physiotherapy service.

<http://sussexmskpartnershipcentral.co.uk/physiotherapy/>