

Shoulder Pain Patient Information

Shoulder pain is a frequent complaint of patients at all ages. While it may start with a sudden injury, it usually begins gradually over a period of weeks to months, or even years. It is often seen in patients who perform repetitive or overhead activities, and becomes more common with aging. Pain is often due to tendonitis or bursitis, an inflammation of the tendons and soft tissue around the shoulders; it may also be called rotator cuff tendonitis.

Unless there is a fracture or major tendon tear, shoulder pain will often improve with simple measures. But it takes patience, as the improvement will occur gradually over several weeks, and requires strict avoidance of aggravating activities. Often the shoulder will never become 100% pain-free; a reasonable expectation is improvement to the point it does not substantially interfere with the normal daily activities or sleep. If your shoulder pain is worsening and interfering more with your day-to-day life, speak to your doctor, since you may need further evaluation, treatment, or referral.

Things you can do to help your shoulder pain:

1. Rest. If it hurts when you do that, don't do that. Often a few days of avoiding the offending activity, then gradually advancing activities as tolerated, will lead to pain-free resumption of your usual activities.
2. Cold. An ice pack or cold compress for 15-20 minutes, especially upon onset of pain or following an activity that aggravates pain, will usually help the pain.
3. Heat. Later a warm compress for 15-20 minutes several times a day will often make the shoulder feel better. Some patients like to alternate warm and cold compresses.
4. Liniment. Ben Gay, Icy Hot, or any liniment you prefer can make your shoulder feel better—but stop it if it becomes too irritating to the skin.
5. Over-the-counter pain medicines. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve) should provide some pain relief. Make sure not to exceed recommended doses, and if you are requiring more of it more frequently, see your doctor.

Stretching Exercises:

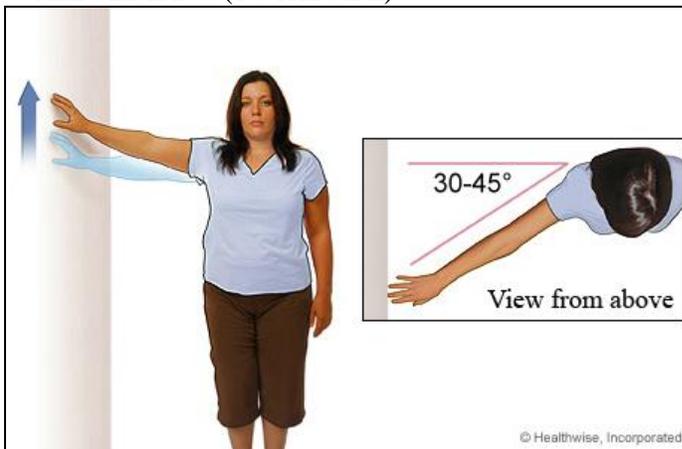
There are several exercises that can help reduce shoulder pain and improve your range of motion. Remember the idea is to perform the exercises to the extent you can *without pain*. Do the movements just to the point of pain, then back off. Gradually, day by day, week by week, you should be able to move better without pain. Perform these exercises 4 times a day.

PENDULUM SWING



- While holding onto a table or the back of a chair with your good arm, bend forward a little and let your injured arm hang straight down.
- This exercise does not use the arm muscles. Rather, use your legs and your hips to create movement that makes your arm swing freely.
- Using the momentum from your hips and legs, guide the slightly swinging arm back and forth like a pendulum, then in circles that start small (about the size of a dinner plate) and gradually grow larger each day as pain allows.
- As you have less pain, try bending over a little farther to do this exercise. This will increase the amount of movement at your shoulder.
- Do this exercise for 1-2 minutes in each direction.

WALL CLIMBING (TO THE SIDE)



Avoid any movement that is straight to your side, and be careful not to arch your back. Your arm should stay about 30-45° to the front of your side.

- Stand with your side to a wall so that your fingers can just touch it at an angle about 30° toward the front of your body.
- Walk the fingers of your injured arm up the wall as high as pain permits. Try not to shrug your shoulder up toward your ear as you move your arm up.
- Hold that position for 15 seconds.
- Walk your fingers back down to the starting position.
- Repeat at least 4 times, trying to reach higher each time.

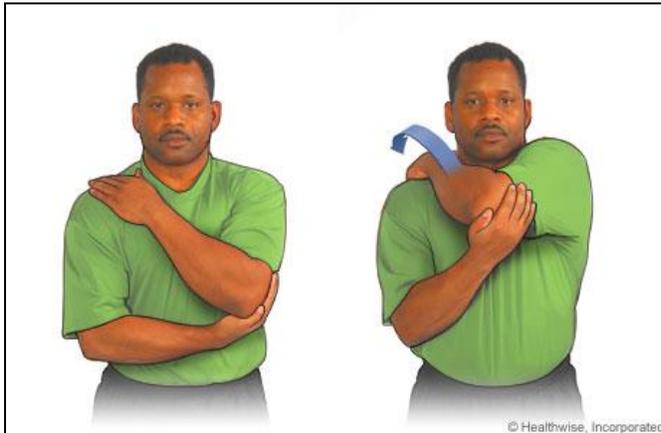
WALL CLIMBING (TO THE FRONT)



During this stretching exercise, be careful not to arch your back.

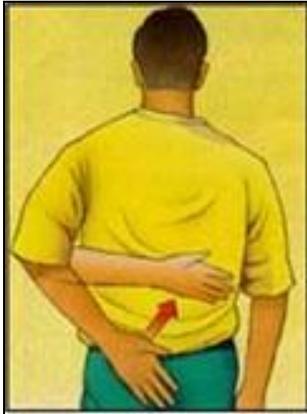
- Face a wall, standing so your fingers can just touch it.
- Keeping your shoulder down (don't shrug up toward your ear), walk the fingers of your injured arm up the wall as high as pain permits.
- Hold that position for 15 seconds.
- Slowly walk your fingers back down to the starting position.
- Repeat at least 4 times, trying to reach higher each time.

POSTERIOR STRETCHING



- Hold the elbow of your injured arm with your opposite hand.
- Use your hand to pull your injured arm gently up and across your body. You will feel a gentle stretch across the back of your injured shoulder.
- Hold for 15 seconds, then slowly lower your arm.
- Repeat 4 times.

UP-THE-BACK STRETCH



- Reach behind your back with your affected arm, and see how far up your back you can scratch with your thumb *without pain*.
- Hold for 15 seconds, then relax.
- Repeat 4 times.

OVERHEAD STRETCH



- Standing about an arm's length away, grasp on to a solid surface, such as a countertop, a doorknob, or the back of a chair.
- With your knees slightly bent, bend forward with your arms straight, lowering your upper body and letting your shoulders stretch.
- As your shoulders are able to stretch farther, you may need to take a step or two backward.
- Hold for at least 15 to 30 seconds then stand up and relax. If you stepped back during your stretch, step forward so you can keep your hands on the solid surface.
- Repeat 4 times.

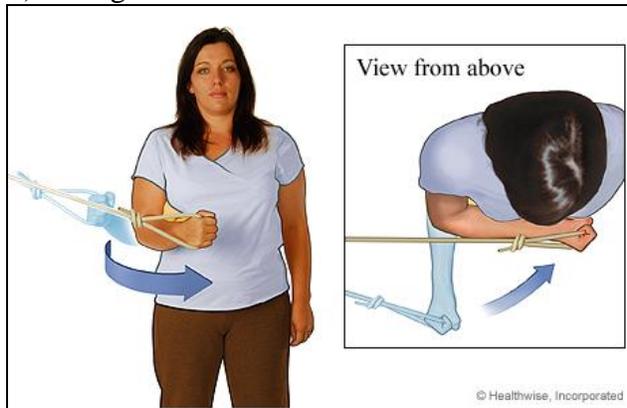
Strengthening exercises:

When you can do all the stretching exercises with a full range of motion and *no pain*, advance to these exercises. You may still wish to do the stretching exercises briefly at the beginning of your exercise session. If these new exercises cause pain, reduce the amount of weight or resistance you are using. If even the lightest attempt to perform these exercises causes pain, stop them and notify your doctor. Perform these exercises 4 times a day.

INTERNAL ROTATION STRENGTHENING EXERCISE

You can do this exercise one of 2 ways:

1) Using an elastic band:



- Begin by tying a piece of elastic exercise material, such as surgical tubing or Thera-Band, to a doorknob.
- Stand or sit with your shoulder relaxed and your elbow bent 90°. Your upper arm should rest comfortably against your side. You can squeeze a rolled towel between your elbow and your body for comfort and to help keep your arm at your side.
- Hold one end of the elastic band in the hand of the affected arm.
- Rotate your forearm toward your body until it touches your belly.
- Keep your elbow and upper arm firmly tucked against the towel roll or the side of your body during this movement.
- Repeat 10 times.
- Start with a lightweight band. When you can do the exercise easily and comfortably for 2 weeks, increase the resistance. You can do this by shortening the piece of material you're using, or getting a stiffer band.

2) Using weights:

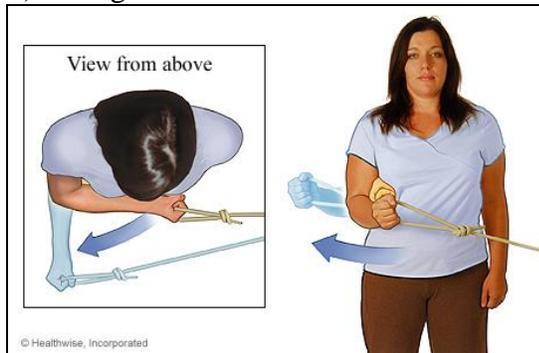


- Lie with the affected arm down and slightly in front of your body; you may wish to have a pillow for your head.
- Hold a light weight or object such as a soup can in your hand.
- Keeping the elbow bent at 90°, lift the weight from the surface to your chest.
- Repeat 10 times.
- Start with a very light weight. When you can do the exercise easily and comfortably for 2 weeks, increase the weight.

EXTERNAL ROTATION STRENGTHENING EXERCISE

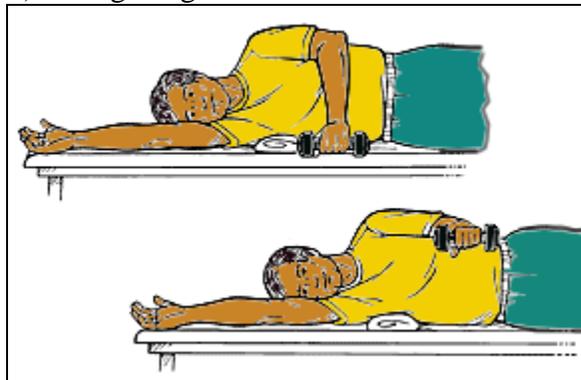
You can do this exercise one of 2 ways:

1) Using an elastic band:



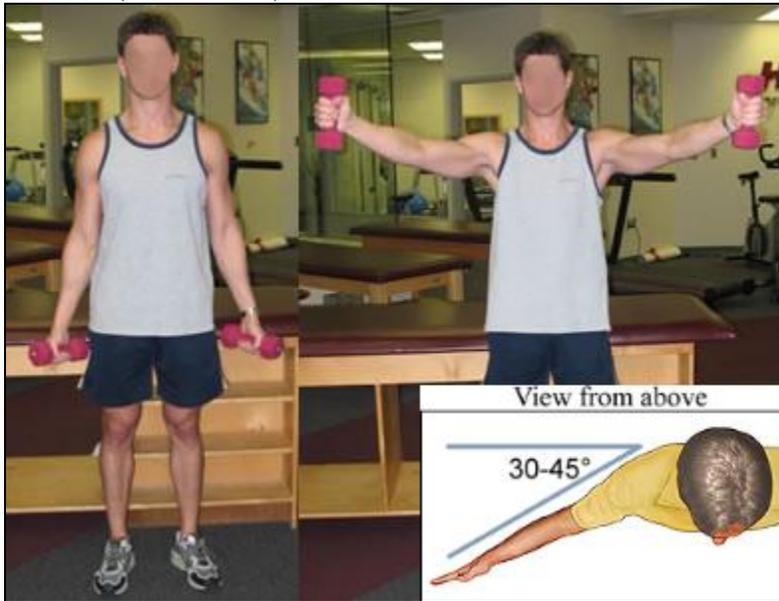
- Begin by tying a piece of elastic exercise material, such as surgical tubing or Thera-Band, to a doorknob. (You may also hold one end of the band in each hand.)
- Stand or sit with your shoulder relaxed and your elbow bent 90°. Your upper arm should rest comfortably against your side. You can squeeze a rolled towel between your elbow and your body for comfort and to help keep your arm at your side.
- Hold one end of the elastic band with the hand of the affected arm.
- Start this exercise with your forearm across your belly. Rotate the forearm out away from your body, keeping your elbow and upper arm tucked against the towel roll or the side of your body until you begin to feel tightness in your shoulder.
- Repeat 10 times.
- Start with a lightweight tube or elastic band. When you can do the exercise easily and comfortably for 2 weeks, increase the resistance. You can do this by shortening the piece of material you're using, or getting a stiffer band.

2) Using weights:



- Lie with the affected arm up; you may wish to have a pillow for your head.
- Hold a light weight or object such as a soup can in your hand on the surface in front of you.
- Keeping the elbow bent at 90°, lift (rotate) the weight off the surface until it is even with the side of your body.
- Repeat 10 times.
- Start with a very light weight. When you can do the exercise easily and comfortably for 2 weeks, increase the weight.

LIFTING (ABDUCTION) STRENGTHENING EXERCISE



- Start with your hands down by your side.
- Lift with your thumbs pointed up until your arms are horizontal. Do not go beyond this point.
- Keep your arms at a 30-45° angle to your body, as illustrated.
- Repeat 10 times.
- Start with a very light weight. When you can do the exercise easily and comfortably for 2 weeks, increase the weight.