

Shoulder pain

What can I do to help?

Pain relief: Simple painkillers (like paracetamol) or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, NSAIDS, (like ibuprofen) are available over the counter and can be very effective for dealing with shoulder pain, but don't use them for more than 2 weeks without seeking medical advice. If you are currently taking any form of medication it is advisable to consult your GP or pharmacist before taking additional pain relief.

Ice: If your shoulder has become swollen and inflamed (warm to the touch) applying an ice pack may be helpful for reducing pain and swelling. A packet of frozen peas wrapped in a tea towel works well as an ice pack. Leave the peas in place for up to 20 minutes at a time. This can be repeated several times a day.

Reducing the strain on your shoulders: It is usually best to carry out your normal activities, but try not to overdo it. You need to pace yourself to start with and try to do a bit more each day. During tasks where you need to lift your arm up over your head, keeping your arm bent until your elbow is above shoulder height will reduce the strain going through the shoulder joint.

Rest and exercise: Aim for a balance between rest and exercise to prevent your shoulder from stiffening up. Try to avoid the movements that are most painful, especially those that hold your arm away from your body and above shoulder height. However, it's important to remain generally active even if you have to limit how much you do.

Exercises to try:

Please try the following exercise programme 2-3 times a day. These exercises may make your shoulder pain worse at first but this will get better over time. Please stop any exercises that make your pain considerably worse.

1. Assisted shoulder flexion



Lying with your arms crossed in front of you. The arm you want to assist should be on top of the other arm.

Slowly lift your arms up towards the ceiling.

Return to start position.

Repeat 5-10 times.

2. Supine external rotation



Lying on your bed or the floor with your shoulder and elbow at 90 degrees and support under your upper arm.

Rotate your arm as far as you can comfortably backwards towards your pillow, keeping your wrist neutral and elbow at the same angle.

Repeat 5-10 times.

3. Isometric shoulder abduction



Stand facing sideways by a wall with the arm you want to strengthen closest to the wall.

Lift your arm up and out to the side against the wall, using the wall to resist the movement.

Hold for 30-45 seconds.

Repeat 3 times