

# Frozen Shoulder

## Information for Patients



**This leaflet has been written to give you the right information about frozen shoulder and what you can do to help with your recovery.**

### What is a frozen shoulder?

The term 'frozen shoulder' is often used to describe a specific a shoulder that has become painful and the movement has become limited.

### What actually happens with a frozen shoulder?

What is thought to happen is that your immune system (your defence system that helps with fighting infections and repairing any damage) 'malfunctions' and starts to cause a reaction in your shoulder, leading to lots of new blood vessels being made and a thickening of normally very flexible and mobile tissues, leaving them very sore and much less flexible. Although this sounds concerning, a frozen shoulder is not a damaged shoulder or a dangerous complaint.

### What are the common symptoms?

**Pain:** Frozen shoulder can be particularly uncomfortable. In most cases, the discomfort doesn't change with movement or positioning and might be with you day or night. The discomfort tends to be the main issue in the early stages of a frozen shoulder.

**Stiffness:** With a frozen shoulder, the movement of the shoulder is limited. Difficulty moving your shoulder is often because of the discomfort in the early stages of a frozen shoulder, however as the pain settles, the tightness can sometimes continue for some time afterwards.

### What can I do to help myself?

**Calm it down:** Often the best place to start with any painful complaint is to try and calm it down. With a frozen shoulder, this can be tricky in the early stages when the discomfort is often most obvious. Adjusting how you use your shoulder/arm may mean you are less likely to aggravate and upset it. For example, your arm might be uncomfortable when reaching

out, therefore trying to not reach so far (i.e. keep a bend in your elbow) or simply moving closer to the object are simple ways to limit how often you might upset the arm.

**Be kind to yourself:** Pain can make you feel vulnerable, drained and sometimes a bit lost. A frozen shoulder can be particularly uncomfortable and might make you feel quite desperate, however your body is amazing and can sort most issues out by itself, but sometimes needs some help.

Shoulder issues do tend get better with time but they can sometimes take a long time to settle. This will vary from person to person, but it is not unusual for a frozen shoulder to take multiple months to ease.

**Pain control:** Some people will choose to manage their pain with pain relief, whilst some may choose to avoid medication. Applying something warm around your shoulder/arm may also be useful in helping with some of the pain (do remember to wrap your hot water bottle in a towel before applying it to your skin to avoid burns).

**Keep it moving:** Try to move your arm as far as you can comfortably as often as you can. You might not be able to do much, but anything is better than nothing.

### Is there anything else that can help?

For some people, a steroid injection into the shoulder can considerably help to manage the pain and improve the function (being able to do things). Although the effects are generally temporary, an injection may help make the discomfort of a frozen shoulder more bearable. You should discuss the option of an injection with your physiotherapist or GP for more information. In some cases, a surgical opinion may be an option, however this is a decision that will be made between you and your physio if it is felt to be necessary.

### Will it get better?

For most people, a frozen shoulder will not be a pleasant experience but reassuringly, it does have the potential to be better. By understanding the issue as best you can and by adjusting what is sore to then allow you to explore some exercise/s, is often the best formula for success.

If you would like to know more about frozen shoulder or find a greater choice of exercises, you can explore our dedicated webpage.

**Search online:** [Norfolk and Waveney MSK services](#) 'frozen shoulder'

## Exercises



Hold onto a sturdy support like a table or the back of a chair. Lean forwards slightly. Keep the arm you want to exercise 'floppy' and gently swing it forwards and backwards or side to side. You should not have to use much/any effort to move your arm.

Complete little and often throughout the day.



Sitting near a table in front of you with a roller or large bottle under your hand. Lean your top half towards the table and allow your arm to move with/over the roller or bottle. Make sure the arm that is being pushed out does little or no work.

Complete little and often throughout the day.



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