

Shoulder Dislocation – Early Stages



Information for Patients

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

What is a shoulder dislocation?

Dislocation is a medical term to describe when joint surfaces are no longer in contact with each other. For your shoulder, it will mean that for a time the ball was not in contact with the socket. It is primarily a soft tissue injury as it is normally the ligaments and other 'soft' structures (tendons etc.) that are stretched and injured.

What are the common symptoms?

Pain: Shoulder dislocations tend to be really quite sore immediately after the injury, however often the pain settles once the joint has been relocated (put back in place). As you might expect, the discomfort you get from a shoulder dislocation can be different from person to person and it is quite normal to have some lingering discomfort for some time after your injury.

Swelling: After a shoulder dislocation, it is possible for you to notice swelling. The swelling may be more around your elbow or wrist/hand. This is normal and related to the effect of gravity.

Limited movement: Whilst your shoulder is sore, you can expect to find that certain movements may be difficult. If you are in a sling, you will find your shoulder difficult to move. You may also find your elbow, wrist and neck equally stiff and uncomfortable. Again, this is normal and actually will help the early stages of your healing. Once you are ready or have been told to by the hospital or your physio, it is important to get your shoulder moving as soon as you feel that you can, as this will make sure your recovery is started nice and early.

Lack of trust: After a dislocation, you may find it hard to trust the arm fully. This is normal and will improve with time and rehabilitation.

What can I do to help myself?

Start using it: Your arm is designed to be used, therefore it is important to try and get it going as soon as you can (in some cases this has to be once the hospital has said they are happy for you to do so). It is likely to be sore but you will not make it worse by using it, in

fact it will help your arm start to get better more effectively. You may need to adjust how you use your arm or how long you do things for in the first stages, but it is something that improves over time for most people.

Trust it: After a shoulder dislocation, you might not feel confident to use your arm or may feel that it will let you down or that you might injure it again. This is extremely normal and might take a little while to improve. It is hoped that the information on this page will help you understand what is normal after a shoulder dislocation and help you to start to trust your shoulder again.

Get exercising: One of the best things for most aches and pain is normal, confident movement. Your shoulder may be sore, stiff and swollen after a dislocation and it might feel like the last thing you might want to do is to move it, but movement is the best medicine. You will not injure it or upset the healing process by moving it.

Is there anything I should avoid?

Try to avoid the position below for the first 6 weeks after your injury:



Will it get better?

For most people, a shoulder dislocation will not be a pleasant experience but reassuringly, it does have the potential to get 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 shoulder dislocations or find a greater choice of exercises, you can explore our dedicated webpage.

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

Exercises



If in a sling:

Using your other arm, lift the arm that is in the sling up towards the ceiling. The arm in the sling should only be doing a little bit of the work for this exercise and most of the effort should come from the other arm.

Complete little and often over the day.



Relax your arm as best as you can and lean your top half forwards. Make sure your arm does no work to get into this position.

Complete little and often over the day.

If not in a sling:

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 over 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 over the day.





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