

# Shoulder injury

## What are shoulder injuries?

Shoulder injuries are common musculoskeletal problems and can occur in various parts of the shoulder:

### Acromio clavicular joint injury:

The acromion part of the shoulder blade, a bone on top of the shoulder which is attached to the collar bone by ligaments. Injury occurs when the ligaments between the shoulder blade and the collar bone are torn. It may occur from a fall onto the shoulder, elbow or from a fall with the arm stretched out in an attempt to break the fall. Repeated overhead use can also cause damage to the ligaments.

### Rotator cuff injury:

The rotator cuff is made up of a group of four tendons that help to stabilize the shoulder joint. The tendons wrap around the head of the humerus (upper arm bone) and attach to the rotator cuff. Injury to the rotator cuff can occur from a fall onto the shoulder, a sudden increase in activity, or from repetitive overhead activities. Sometimes the tendons can become inflamed from frequent use such as playing sports or lifting heavy objects, often called tendonitis. Aging also causes the tendons to wear down which can lead to a tear of the tendons.

### Frozen shoulder:

A frozen shoulder can occur due to lack of use caused by on-going pain. Arthritis can cause frozen shoulder and it is usually a gradual onset of an aching shoulder.

Men, women and children can all have shoulder injuries. Shoulder problems often occur in people more than 60 years old.

## What are the symptoms?

### Symptoms of acromio clavicular joint injury:

Pain at the end of the collar bone where it joins to the shoulder. Pain when moving the shoulder, especially when raising your arm above the shoulder.

## Symptoms of rotator cuff injury:

Some tears are painful but others are not. Pain is usually in the front of the shoulder sometimes going down the side of the arm and can be severe for a few days. You may have pain when sleeping, or when reaching, or lifting your arm above your head. Sometimes the arm can feel weaker.

Depending on the type of injury, the pain may be sudden (common in a tear), or gradual (common in tendonitis).

## Symptoms of frozen shoulder:

Movement of the shoulder becomes restricted. Widespread pain can develop which can be worse at night and when lying on the affected shoulder.

## How is it diagnosed?

The practitioner will examine your shoulder for any tenderness over the surrounding muscles and bones and will assess the movement of your shoulder. Sometimes an x-ray will be performed if the practitioner is concerned there may be an injury to any of the bones in the shoulder. However, an x-ray is not required to make a diagnosis. In some instances a scan may be necessary to produce images of the structures that make up the shoulder.

## How is it treated?

### Acromio clavicular joint injury:

A sling will need to be worn to keep the shoulder in place and the joint will have to be rested.

Ice is often an effective treatment to relieve pain and swelling. Ice packs or bags of frozen peas, wrapped in a towel and applied to your shoulder for a maximum of 30 minutes at any one time.

Rarely, surgery may be necessary if the shoulder does not get better after six to 12 months.

### **Rotator cuff injury:**

A sling will need to be worn to keep the shoulder in place and the joint will have to be rested.

Stretches and strengthening exercises help to gradually improve range of movement,

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## **Have your say**

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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