



Adhesive capsulitis

AKA ... frozen shoulder

Shoulder stiffness and pain can be very frustrating, especially if your dominant arm is involved. Pain may be nearly constant, or only when you try to move your arm in a typical manner. You may have trouble finding a comfortable sleep position in the acute phase. Most people cannot remember anything that seemed to initiate this condition - this is very typical. Shoulder pain is often due to an accumulation of stress to the shoulder, particularly stresses that involve the rotator cuff tendons, and other structures that lie directly under the bone at the tip of your shoulder. The typical posture of your head, neck, and shoulder influence the movement mechanics of your shoulder, especially with overhead activity and with reaching behind your back. Stiffness of the shoulder or even too much flexibility of the shoulder may contribute to excess wear and tear of the joint structures and tendons. Pain and stiffness usually result when the healing process cannot keep up with the breakdown of tissues under repeated stress. At some point, the pain actually subsides, but you may still be left with pronounced shoulder stiffness that limits your range of motion.

The good news is that this condition can be treated. Cold application helps to ease pain and spasm as well as reduce the effects of inflammation. Rest from painful activities may also be advised. Standard conservative treatment usually involves physical therapy 3-5 times per week, with emphasis on a daily home program of stretching. Sometimes if this condition becomes chronic or stretching fails to make expected gains in range of motion, your physician may advise a manipulation under anesthesia, or perhaps a type of surgery. Even if you choose to undergo a medical procedure, you will still need to perform stretching exercises to maintain or even further improve your shoulder motion. The following are some helpful hints as well as some common exercises to assist in your recovery.

Do's:

- Rest from activities that aggravate your condition - those causing more than mild discomfort.
- Use ice, commercial cold packs, or a bag of frozen peas on your shoulder throughout the day if you have nearly constant pain, and perhaps 2-3 times per day if having intermittent symptoms. Apply the cold for about 15-20 minutes.
- Stretch, as directed, throughout the day. Improving range of motion for the long term is addressed through at least an hour of stretching (in each direction) each day. This means you may be spending about 10 minutes of stretching 6 times each day.

Stretch frequently, but causing no more than mild pain.

Don'ts:

- Don't give up! This condition can be very frustrating. It is easy to get bored or frustrated with exercising, especially when gains seem to come very slowly, but stretching is the key to your recovery!
- Avoid keeping your arm in one position for long periods. Even when you walk, concentrate on allowing your arm to swing normally rather than holding it tightly to your side.
- If you accidentally cause too much pain when you are stretching - and therefore cause more aching afterward - don't just stop stretching for the day. Resume your usual schedule of stretching, just be gentler.