



Personal exercise program

Musculo-skeletal and Pelvic health physiotherapy services
If you wish to provide feedback of our Service please use this web link.



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Rotator cuff related pain

What is the rotator cuff?

The shoulder is a complex region of the body made up of 3 joints, and multiple muscles and ligaments. The rotator cuff muscles are found deep within the shoulder. They arise from the shoulder blade and attach via their tendons to the top of the shoulder bone. They provide strength and stability to the shoulder during movement. When there is a problem with these tendons individuals can experience pain, weakness and stiffness on lifting the shoulder up and with rotational movements.

How do problems with the rotator cuff develop?

- injury or trauma to the arm
- weakness in the rotator cuff muscles
- repetitive activities/ exercise
- following a change in activity or stress on the shoulder
- a flare up of degenerative changes within the tendons

When the rotator cuff muscles and/or tendons have been injured or aggravated they can become painful over the top of the shoulder. Some people also experience pain traveling down the side of the arm to the elbow.

The tendons within the shoulder can become inflamed and painful which can make movement difficult. In some cases these muscles can over protect the shoulder, which can become very stiff and limited with movements. Because of the pain and limited movement these muscles become weaker and make movement even more challenging.

Aim of physiotherapy in management

Managing how much load and stress goes through your shoulder is important to treating rotator cuff pain. Initially reducing aggravating activities can help settle down the pain, with the aim of building back up to your activity and tasks over time. However, it is important that we do not completely rest the shoulder or these muscles will become weaker, increase your pain and limit your function.

The aim of this rehabilitation programme is to gradually increase the range of movement and strength of the shoulder.

Over a period of time you should notice an increase in your strength and you should be able to build up the amount of exercises you can tolerate and progress onto harder exercises.

A small amount of pain is acceptable and can be expected during the rehabilitation exercises but should not aggravate your pain or make it worse.

- Pain should be 4/10 or less during the activity
- No increased pain for prolonged periods 24hours after exercises

- The pain shouldn't interfere with sleep following the exercises

You can increase and decrease the amount of exercises you can tolerate depending on your pain symptoms.



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Stand with your arm close to your side and your elbow at a right angle.

Push the palm of your hand against the other hand. Hold approx. 45 secs.

Repeat 5 times.



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Stand or sit. Hold your upper arm close to your body with your elbow at a right angle.

Try to move your hand outward, resisting the movement with the other hand. There should be no movement.

Hold 45 seconds.

Repeat 5 times.



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Stand facing a wall. Keep your upper arm close to the side with elbow at a right angle.

Push your fist against the wall.

Hold for 45 seconds

Repeat 5 times.



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Stand sideways against a wall with your upper arm close to your side and elbow at a right angle.

Push the forearm to the side against the wall.

Hold for 45 seconds

Repeat 5 times.



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Sit or stand. Place your hands on a table.

Slide your hands along the table as far as you can without lifting your shoulders.

Repeat times.



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Stand facing a wall.

'Walk' your fingers up the wall as high as possible. Reverse down in the same way.

Repeat times.



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Stand leaning on a table with one hand.

Let your other arm hang relaxed straight down. Swing your arm as if drawing a circle on the floor. Change direction.

Repeat times.



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Sit or stand with both elbows at right angles. Place a rolled towel between your elbow and side. Hold a stick with both hands.

Push the stick to move the arm outwards

Repeat times.

Lying on your back with elbows straight.



Use one arm to lift the other arm up keeping it as close to the ear as possible.

Repeat _____ times.

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Stand or sit.

Lift your arm to the side, assisting the movement with your other hand.

Repeat _____ times.

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Sit. Place your hand on the front of the opposite shoulder. Feel your shoulder with your fingers making sure that the shoulder does not come forward.

Move your shoulder gently back into the shoulder socket (small movement).

Hold 5 seconds.

Repeat _____ times.

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Pull a rope through a ring located high above your head. Sit with your side near a wall. Hold onto both ends of the rope.

Lift your arm and assist by pulling down with the other hand.

Repeat _____ times.

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Stand and grip one end of the stick with the arm to be exercised.

Lift the stick up forwards or sideways by assisting with the other arm.

Repeat _____ times.

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Stand or sit. With one arm bring a string over your shoulder behind your back. Get hold of the string with the arm to be exercised.

Pull upwards bringing the lower arm up as far as possible. Hold approx.
20 secs.

Repeat _____ times.