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Frozen Shoulder Handout

WHAT IS IT?

Frozen shoulder, also known as adhesive capsulitis, is a condition where the shoulder becomes very stiff and painful. There is a loss of shoulder motion and significant pain with many types of daily activities. The shoulder joint is surrounded by a membrane or capsule that becomes painful and then shrinks which prevents movement of the shoulder.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Your shoulder will typically lose its ability to move freely in most directions. The pain and loss of motion is often most noticeable when trying to raise your arm above shoulder level or reaching up behind your back. Daily activities like getting dressed, fixing your hair, reaching for an object and lifting can be difficult and painful. The symptoms typically go through 3 phases. During the **freezing phase** your shoulder is very painful and gets tighter & tighter. Then during the **frozen phase** the shoulder tends to be less sensitive but stays just as tight despite the exercises and therapy. At some point you hit the **thawing phase** where the pain decreases and the shoulder movement gradually returns.

The natural history of a frozen shoulder is that it will get better. Unfortunately, the time course is variable and this condition can last from 6 months to a year, or even longer.

WHY DOES IT HURT?

When you try to move your shoulder, you stretch the tight capsule which causes pain. This pain is not a sign of damage; in fact one of the treatments for frozen shoulder is to move the shoulder while you are under anesthesia.

WHY DO I HAVE IT?

We don't know. There have been many theories but no clear answer. It may be related to hormonal changes as it occurs more commonly in women age 45-55. It could potentially be related to the immune system and it is more common and severe in patients with diabetes.

WHAT DO I DO TO GET BETTER?

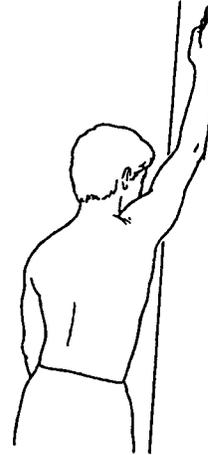
A frozen shoulder is typically treated with physical therapy, a home stretching program and anti-inflammatory medication. Using heat before stretching does help loosen things up so you may want to try a hot shower or a moist heat pack. At the end of the day or after a therapy session, you may want to use an ice pack for 20-30 minutes. This will calm the tissue and inflammation down and help with the pain.

When you are in the active stages (freezing and frozen) of the disease, you should do frequent gentle stretches—typically for a few minutes every hour. It is not likely that you will see much improvement in motion during these early phases but the stretches will help prevent further tightening and pain. Continuing these stretches through the thawing phase is important and it will be then that you finally see improvement in your motion.

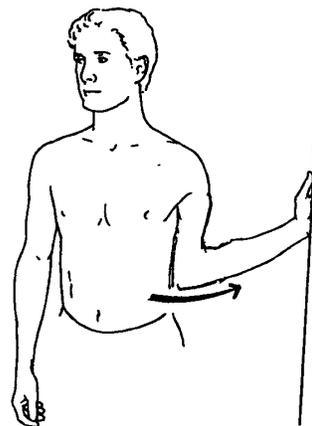
SUGGESTIONS FOR SOME DAILY STRETCHES TO START WITH AT HOME:

Hold each stretch for 10-15 seconds—perform routine for a few minutes each hour

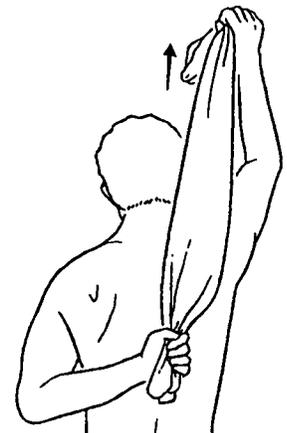
Walk your way up the wall and then lean into the stretch (flexion stretch)



Must keep your elbow at your side (external rotation stretch)



Affected arm should be behind your back (internal rotation stretch)



Affected arm stretches across body (posterior capsule stretch)

