

Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department

Information Following Your Shoulder Fracture

This information leaflet has been provided by the Physiotherapy department to assist you in returning back to normal following your shoulder fracture. The following information will give you some advice and exercises to do while you wait to start your physiotherapy sessions. If you have any queries about the information provided in this leaflet, please call the Physiotherapy department on 01603 286990: Monday – Friday between 09.00 – 16.00.

A fracture normally occurs when excessive force is transferred up the arm, often as a result of putting your arms out to break a fall.

An X-ray will be taken in A&E and a decision will be made if the fracture should be managed with or without an operation. If the Consultant has concerns, a repeat set of X-rays may be taken 4-6 weeks after the injury to check the fracture is healing. In this scenario, your physiotherapist will be guided by outcome of these X-rays and will advise on appropriate exercise progression.

You will be given a sling to support the arm whilst your injury heals.

You have been referred to physiotherapy for exercises to help with pain relief and to improve shoulder movement and muscle strength to help you resume your everyday activities. Depending on the severity of the injury, some patients may have some shoulder stiffness in the longer term, but physiotherapy will aim to restore as much movement and strength as possible. Your overall recovery may take up 12-18 months.

Weaning from the sling

Unless your consultant has told you otherwise, you can start to wean out of your sling as pain and comfort allows.

It is vital that you do not spend too much time in the sling, as this can make your shoulder more stiff and sore and can make it harder to get the shoulder moving again. We recommend coming out of the sling 3-4 times a day to complete some gentle pendular exercises (see page 5).

A more comfortable way to support your arm without the sling is to rest your arm on a pillow / the arm of the sofa as shown. This position prevents the muscles in the neck and at the front of the shoulder from becoming tight. Otherwise, when you are standing, you can hook your thumb into your trouser pocket to help with carrying the weight of your arm. Try to keep your neck, elbow, wrist and fingers moving normally to prevent stiffness and swelling in these joints.



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If you are able to comfortably bring your hand to your mouth, or your hand to your forehead then this is a good indication that the muscles are strong enough for you to come out of the sling full time.

During the first 6 weeks however, you may wish to wear your sling when you are out in public if you are worried about people bumping into you. Try to avoid using your injured arm to push yourself out of the chair, where possible.

For those with restrictions

Occasionally you will be told by the consultant you should avoid certain movements, especially if they have arranged a follow up X-ray to make sure the fracture is healing in the right position. In this case, you will be given exercises to do that allow you to follow the precautions given by your consultant.

If you have had an operation for your fracture

It is important that you ensure your wound has completely healed with no open or wet patches and stitches should be removed before getting the wound wet. This is to minimise your risk of obtaining a post-operative infection.

If you experience any of the following:

- Severe unrelenting or worsening pain
- Worsening hot/red/swollen wound
- Fever or temperature
- A wound that is oozing or smells

Contact your GP and ask for an urgent appointment or call 111 as it is important to rule out a wound infection.

Pain Relief

Take pain relief to help you to move your arm more comfortably. You may have been prescribed some by a doctor or you may wish to discuss your needs with a pharmacist. You may also wish to try heat and ice as described below to help reduce your pain.

Application of ice: Place a wet tea towel directly over your skin, and then place a bag of frozen peas on top of the towel. Keep the peas on for 15 – 20 minutes, checking your skin regularly to avoid an ice burn. Repeat up to 3 times a day.

Application of heat: Wrap a hot water bottle in a towel and place over the area. Keep it on for 15 – 20 minutes, checking your skin from time to time. Repeat up to three times a day. Warm water can also help to reduce the pain and allows movement to feel easier, so doing some of the exercises in or after a warm shower may be more comfortable.

Sleeping

It is important that you have a good bedtime routine to relax the muscles. It is not uncommon to wake 2-3 times a night. Try using a pillow to rest your arm on so that its weight is supported when you sleep. In the short term you should avoid lying on the affected side until it feels better.

Suggested Sleep Positions



Washing and Dressing

You may have to adapt your usual routine or need some help because of temporarily being one-handed. To apply deodorant to the same side hold onto the wash basin and walk backwards and to the opposite side cup the affected arm under the elbow to support it as you reach across.



Picture A



Picture B

You may want to avoid:

- getting clothes on overhead
- having a bath if you normally rely on the affected arm to help you get in and out
- pushing yourself up from the chair

When dressing, you will find it easier to put your affected arm into clothing first. When undressing, it is easier to remove the affected arm last.

Driving

You may return to driving once when you feel confident that you can safely control your vehicle and perform an emergency stop. It is advisable to inform the DVLA and your insurance company that you are returning to driving.

Smoking Cessation

Evidence has shown that smoking prolongs fracture healing time. It is important that you consider this information with relation to your recent injury. Stopping smoking during the healing phase of your fracture will help ensure optimal recovery from this injury. For advice on smoking cessation and local support available, please refer to the following website: <http://smokefree.nhs.uk> or discuss this with your GP.

Exercises

The exercises overleaf are aimed at helping you to regain range of movement in your elbow and to prevent your shoulder from becoming stiff. We would advise that you complete your exercises 3-4 times a day.

Each stage of exercises is colour coded. Do not move onto the next stage until your physiotherapist has advised you to, or until the previous stage is feeling comfortable and easy.

It is important that you do not push through pain that you would describe as being more than a 5/10. Any pain or discomfort after you have stopped exercising should settle down within 1 hour of you stopping the exercises. If your pain is still worse as a result of the exercises, you could be overdoing them, try moving your shoulder more gently and slowly and consider doing less repetitions.

For further information please contact: Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department Telephone: 01603 286990 Monday to Friday between 09.00 - 16.00.

Stage One: Start Shoulder Pendulum Exercises Now

If you have any queries/concerns about your exercises, please call the physiotherapy department on: 01603 286990

Repeat the following exercises 3 – 4 times a day



Stand using a table/kitchen worktop for balance/support. Bend from your waist and gently hang your affected arm in front of you.

Let your other arm hang relaxed straight down. Allow gravity to move your arm round in very small movements as if your arm is a pendulum of a clock.

1. Clockwise and then anticlockwise
2. Forwards and backwards
3. Side to side

Repeat 5 - 10 times in each direction



Bend your elbow and then straighten your elbow as much as you comfortably can without pushing through pain.

Repeat 5 - 10 times



Make a fist and then straighten your fingers. If you cannot make a fist use your other hand to bring your fingers closer to your palm.

Repeat 10 times.



Tilt your head toward one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side.

Hold approx. 20 secs. Repeat 3 times on each side.



Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch.

Hold approx. 20 secs. Repeat 3 times on each side.

Stage Two: Auto-assisted Shoulder Mobilising Exercises

(To commence at approximately 4-6 weeks post injury)
Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department on: 01603 286990



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You can now use your other hand to help improve your shoulder range of movement.

Please do not worry if you cannot achieve as much movement as the pictures demonstrate. Go to the point of stretch but do not push through pain that you'd describe as being more than 5/10.

Repeat the exercises 3-4 times a day.



Sitting or standing, link both hands together in front of you with your elbows bent. Slowly raise both hands up towards the ceiling using your uninjured arm to help lift the injured arm. Only go as high as you can comfortably go and do not push through pain. Slowly lower back down keeping both hands linked together. Repeat 5 – 10 times.



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In sitting rest your hands on a table. Using a duster/towel slide both hands forwards as far as comfortable. Let your head drop forwards slightly at the end of the movement. Do not force into a stretch.

Repeat 5 – 10 times



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Stand or sit. Keeping your elbow tucked into your side, use your other hand to help push your forearm away from your body. Do not push into pain.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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Tighten your shoulder blade muscles and lift your shoulder gently back and up (small movement).

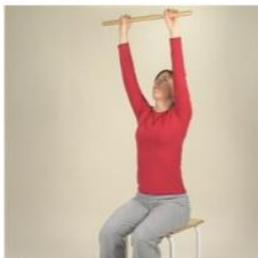
Hold 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

Stage Two: Shoulder Mobilising Exercises using a stick
(To commence at approximately 4-6 weeks post injury)
Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department on: 01603 286990



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Please do not worry if you cannot achieve as much movement as the pictures demonstrate. Go to the point of stretch but do not push through pain that you'd describe as being more than 5/10.



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Hold a stick or a broom handle with both hands. Start with your arms low down by your thighs and then lift the stick up above your head. Do not push through pain. Slowly lower the stick down in a controlled manner. You may find this easier lying on your back.

Repeat 5 - 10 times



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Stand holding a stick/broom with both hands. Grip one end of the stick with the arm to be exercised. Using the other hand, push the stick up and out to the side. Do not push through pain.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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Sit or stand with both elbows at right angles holding onto a stick/broom with both hands. Keeping your elbow tucked into your side, push the stick to move the injured arm outwards. You may wish to put a folded towel between your elbow and your side. Do not push through pain

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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To help get your hand higher up your back:

Hold a towel behind your back as shown in the picture with your injured hand at the bottom of the towel in line with your bottom. Straighten the elbow of the uninjured arm at the top of the towel to lift the bottom hand higher up your back.

To help get your hand lower down your back:

Switch hands so that the injured hand is at the top of the towel in line with the back of your head/neck. Straighten the elbow of the uninjured arm at the bottom of the towel to bring the top hand lower down your back.

Repeat each exercise 3 - 5 times. Do not push through pain.

Stage Three: Shoulder Strengthening Exercises using Free Weights
(To commence at approximately 6-8 weeks post injury)
Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department on: 01603 286990



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The following exercises are designed to help you to strengthen your shoulder. It is important that you do this gradually: starting with a light weight such as a can of vegetables or a small bottle of water. You may progress to using heavier items as you feel able.

Repeat 3 sets of 8-10 repetitions with a minute's rest in between each set.



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Find a smooth wall or wall mirror and a cloth/towel that will slide easily on the wall (or put clean socks on your hands). Stand facing the wall. Place the edges of your hands against the wall with your thumbs facing you/palms facing each other.

Now step forward as you gently push into the wall and slide your hands up as far as you can. Relax and return to start position.



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Stand tall with your arms by your side, hold a weight with one hand.

Keeping your elbow by your side, bend your elbow and bring your palm towards your shoulder. Straighten your arm back to the starting position in a controlled manner.



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Stand tall. Hold weights at shoulder height, elbows pointing forward.

Lift weights up by straightening your elbows.

Return to the starting position.

Try not to shrug your shoulders as you do this.



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Stand tall, with arms by your sides, holding weights.

Lift your arms to the side, keeping elbows straight. Palms face downwards or forwards.

Keep your chest open and try not to shrug your shoulders.

Stage Four: Weight-Bearing Shoulder Strengthening Exercises

(To commence at approximately 10-12 weeks post injury)

Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department on: 01603 286990

At 10-12 weeks after your injury, you can start taking some body weight through your elbow.



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The exercises on this sheet are in order of difficulty. Only progress on to the next exercise if the one before has felt comfortable and easy.

If you are not aiming to get back to doing press ups / return to high level strength, then you may only do choose to do the first 2-3 exercises.



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Lean against a wall with straight arms and fingers pointing upwards. Keeping both hands on the wall shift your weight from your right hand to your left hand.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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Stand with the palms of your hands on a table. Keep your arms straight and fingers pointing forwards. Press down and straighten your fingers against the table. Keeping both hands on the table shift your body weight from one hand to the other.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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On all fours keeping your elbows straight and keeping both hands flat on the floor, shift your body weight gently forwards and backwards over your hands as pain allows.

Then try shifting your body weight gently to the right and to the left. Repeat 5 - 10 times.



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Wall Push Up: Standing facing a wall, make sure your hands are placed a little wider than the width of your shoulders, your hands are turned out slightly and your elbows are below your shoulders. lower your body towards the wall keeping your body nice and tall.

Repeat 5 – 10 times.

Stage Four: Weight-Bearing Shoulder Strengthening Exercises (To commence at approximately 10-12 weeks post injury) Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department on: 01603 286990



If wall push ups feel comfortable, next progress to push ups on your hands and knees.

On your hands and knees, hands slightly wider than shoulders. Buttocks and trunk active, body in a straight line. In a controlled manner lower your chest close to the floor. Push back up.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.



If all previous exercises have felt easy and comfortable you may now try a full push up.

Start on your hands and toes, body in a straight line and hands wider than shoulder-width. Press your hands against the floor.

Lower your chest towards the floor while maintaining the straight line of the body. Forearms should stay as upright as possible. Push back to the starting position.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.