

Frozen Shoulder

Frozen shoulder is a common condition where you lose the ability to move your shoulder in all directions. Your shoulder freezes. Reaching overhead, behind your back or to the side becomes restricted and painful. Most of the time, frozen shoulder gets better but some people are left with permanent stiffness. Frozen shoulder has three stages:

- **Painful stage.** Pain is present most or all of the time. Sleeping is difficult and all movements aggravate the pain. Usually lasts three to six months, sometimes more.
- **Frozen stage.** Pain lessens but shoulder continues to stiffen. Can last up to 12 months.
- **Recovery stage.** Pain goes away and shoulder movements begin to come back. Can last up to 24 months.

Causes of frozen shoulder

Normally, tissues around the shoulder joint are well lubricated and able to stretch so your arm moves easily in all directions. If these tissues become inflamed, they shorten, lose their stretch and cause the shoulder to stiffen. There are two causes of frozen shoulder:

- Pain and stiffness starts gradually without any obvious cause. Women over 40 with a history of diabetes or thyroid problems are at greater risk.
- After an injury or following surgery where the shoulder is kept still for a long time (e.g., in a sling).

How physiotherapists help

Physiotherapists are highly skilled at assessing and treating people with frozen shoulder. Physiotherapists can conduct a thorough examination to determine if you have frozen shoulder and what stage it's in. It is important to understand the stage as treatment differs for each stage. Pushing the movement too early can worsen the pain, not pushing enough can lead to more stiffness. Physiotherapists can tell you how much to push.

Your physiotherapist will:

- Focus on pain control in the painful stage (e.g., gentle exercises, treatments to gently stretch the joint, work with your doctor to get something for pain/relax tight muscles)
- Focus on range of motion in the frozen stage (e.g., strengthening exercises, manual therapy)
- Focus on exercises and rehabilitation in the recovery stage to restore range of motion and function

Recovery takes time and success depends upon participation in the treatment plan provided by your physiotherapist.



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