

# Frozen Shoulder

## Management and Treatment

Frozen Shoulder is a condition whereby the shoulder joint becomes stiff and painful to move in all directions. It usually develops gradually, worsens over time, then eventually resolves; this usually occurs over a 2 year period. Frozen shoulder affects mainly people between the ages of 40 and 60 years old, it can occur in either shoulder, and in men or women. The medical term for frozen shoulder is Adhesive Capsulitis.

### How do you get Frozen Shoulder?

This cause of frozen shoulder is currently not fully understood. Some people can develop a frozen shoulder after injury to the shoulder, however many people develop a frozen shoulder with no known cause.

The shoulder is a ball and socket joint which allows it to move in more directions than any other joint in the body. There is a capsule around the joint which is made up of soft tissue fibres. In a frozen shoulder, this capsule becomes contracted and forms bands of scar tissue called adhesions. This causes stiffness and often severe pain in the shoulder joint.

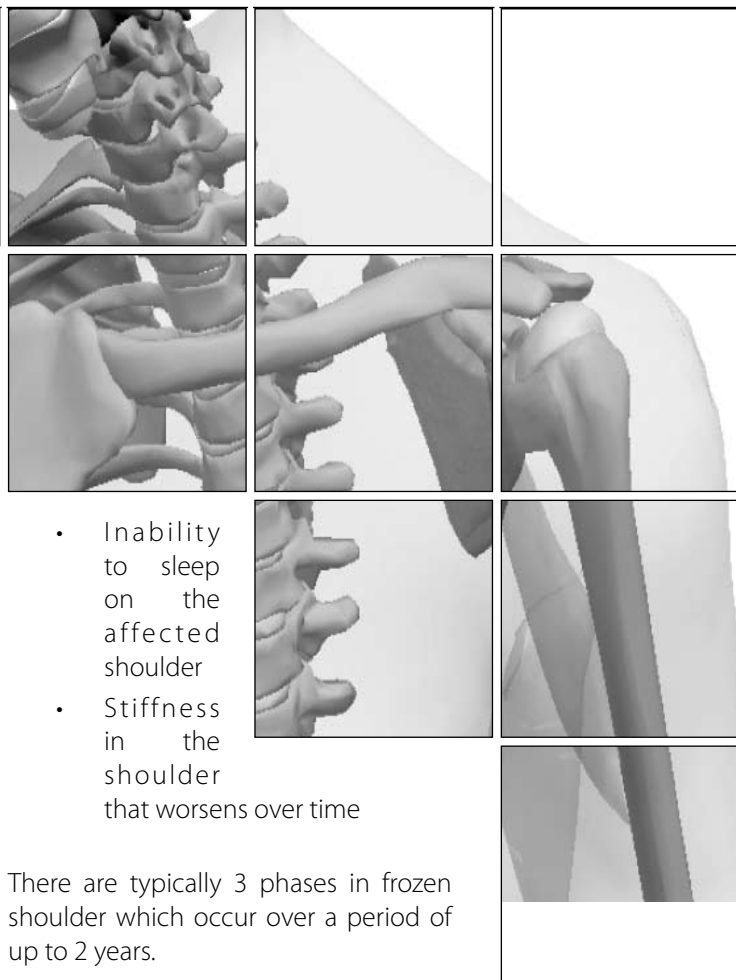
There are certain things that make people more at risk of developing a frozen shoulder, including:

- Age – it is more common in people of ages 40 – 60 years old
- Gender – about 70% of people who get frozen shoulder are women
- Diabetes – people with diabetes are more likely to develop the condition and it also takes longer to recover
- Immobility – not moving a shoulder often enough after an injury can turn into a frozen shoulder
- Systemic diseases such as tuberculosis, thyroid issues, Parkinson's disease and cardiovascular disease puts people more at risk.

### What does Frozen Shoulder feel like?

Frozen shoulder usually comes on gradually over time. It is usually associated with pain, stiffness and limitation in shoulder movement. Your strength is not usually affected. Common symptoms include:

- Dull or aching pain; sometimes sharp with movement
- Pain in the outer region of the shoulder that can radiate into the outer upper arm
- Worse at night and in cold environments



- Inability to sleep on the affected shoulder
- Stiffness in the shoulder that worsens over time

There are typically 3 phases in frozen shoulder which occur over a period of up to 2 years.

**Phase 1** – Freezing phase: the shoulder gradually becomes more painful over a period of time. With pain, the shoulder starts becoming stiffer.

**Phase 2** – Frozen phase: The shoulder pain improves a little during this phase. However, shoulder movement will be extremely limited and performing daily tasks such as dressing or grooming will be painful and difficult.

**Phase 3** – Thawing phase: The shoulder pain will gradually alleviate and diminish during this phase. It will also be easier to move the shoulder as the stiffness improves while your shoulder is “thawing”.

### What can I do to get better more quickly?

Frozen Shoulder will go away on its own. However, this can take up to 2 years and the pain and stiffness can become very debilitating.

There are some treatments that can help you cope with the pain and stiffness and help you get better quicker, including:

- Medications – taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs) can help reduce the inflammation and pain. Speak to your GP or a pharmacist for more information
- Heat – applying heat to the shoulder can help relieve the pain and stiffness

- Exercises – stretching exercises should be performed to prevent the shoulder from getting stiffer. See recommended exercises below.

If your shoulder pain does not improve within 2 weeks, see your GP or a physiotherapist for further advice.

Other treatment options may include:

- Physiotherapy – a physiotherapist can help move your shoulder joint to prevent further stiffness and promote mobility in the shoulder. They can also show you specific exercises to perform at home
- Corticosteroids – a steroid injection can help to alleviate the pain in severe cases. Your GP or specialist will help decide whether this is suitable for you
- Manipulation under anaesthesia (MUA) – this may be an option for severe cases. This procedure involves anaesthetising your shoulder and having a doctor move the joint to stretch the scar tissue
- Hydrodistension – this involves injecting liquid into your shoulder to stretch the tissues to make it easier to move. This may be suitable for severe cases
- Acupuncture – this can help relieve the pain in your shoulder

### Recommended exercises for Frozen Shoulder

#### Towel stretch

- Hold the ends of a bath towel using your hands
- The towel should be behind you – your hand on the sore side near your buttock and the other hand next to your ear
- Using the non-painful side, pull the towel upwards away from the ear until you feel the onset of pain in the sore shoulder
- Hold the position for 15 seconds and repeat 3 times



#### Wall crawl

- Face a wall about half a metre away from you
- Using only your fingers (not your shoulder muscles) crawl



your fingers up the wall until you feel the onset of pain

- Hold the position for 15 seconds and repeat 3 times

#### Stick external rotation exercise

- Hold a stick horizontally in front of you with both elbows next to your body and bent to 90 degrees
- Using the non-painful side, push the stick sideways towards the painful side until you feel the onset of pain
- Hold the position for 15 seconds and repeat 3 times



#### Posterior shoulder stretch

- Bring your arm on the affected side across your chest
- Use your other hand to pull the elbow closer to your body
- Hold the position for 15 seconds and repeat 3 times



*For more information, please contact your Family Doctor*