

Subacromial shoulder pain (non-irritable)

Your GP or Physiotherapist may have diagnosed you with 'Subacromial Shoulder Pain'. (It is also called 'Rotator Cuff Related Shoulder Pain' or 'Shoulder Impingement Syndrome'). All these titles all describe the same thing. It essentially means that you have non-threatening shoulder pain that is usually from irritation of the tendons deep in your shoulder called the Rotator Cuff.

Subacromial shoulder pain is the most cause of shoulder pain but can be self-managed really effectively following some simple advice and exercises. The vast majority all settle given enough time and a gradual/incremental loading programme over a course of 3-6 months. You will find it will likely take 5-6 weeks before you start to see improvements. If are you not progressing as hoped, get in contact with your Physiotherapist for further advice.

What can I do to help?

If you are struggling with the intermittent pain, the following advice should help you to get started:

Pain relief: Basic painkillers (like Paracetamol) or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory gels (such as Ibuleve or Voltarol gel) are cheap and easily available over the counter without the need for prescription. These can be very effective as they lessen your discomfort and importantly allow you to keep your shoulder moving. However, please check the labels for instructions/safe usage and any possible reasons why you should not use them. If you are currently taking any form of medication it is advisable to consult your GP or pharmacist before taking additional pain relief.

Heat or Ice: Heat is often useful for easing pain using a hot water bottle or wheat pack. Use for 15-20 minutes at a time and repeat several times a day as necessary. However you may find it more therapeutic to use an ice pack to ease your pain/irritation. A packet of frozen peas wrapped in a tea-towel works well. Leave in place for up to 15 minutes at a time. Again, this can be repeated several times a day if found helpful.

Rest vs. activity: It is usually best to carry out your normal activities, but try not to overdo it. Let pain be your guide; short-lasting/temporary discomfort is fine but worsening or constant 24/7 pain indicates you are likely doing too much and need to take things a little easier. You need to pace yourself to start with and try to do a bit more each few days. You will find keeping your shoulder gently moving more comfortable than complete rest.

Scans or imaging: Scans or imaging are rarely indicated as these often correlate very poorly with symptoms. Most people without shoulder pain have features/changes on their scans that do not cause any symptoms at all.

Exercise

There is a wealth of evidence now that shows that exercise is the very best way to manage and resolve subacromial shoulder pain. It will help you gradually build the tolerance and load-capacity of your tissues and reduce the sensitivity of your pain. It will also help ease any stiffness.

Perform this exercise programme 1-2 times a day. It is advised that you continue this exercise programme for a course of 3-6 months. You are aiming for a small increase in pain that goes away within 30-60 minutes and not worse the next day. If you happen to find it too sore afterwards; don't worry, do fewer repetitions the next time and then gradually build up again as tolerated. It will likely take 5-6 weeks before you start to see improvement.

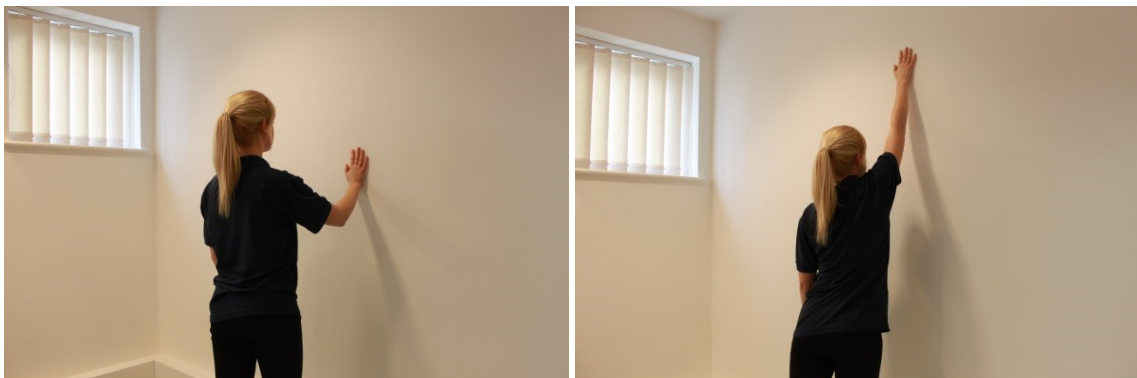
If your shoulder pain does not start to improve over the next 5-6 weeks, or gets worse despite the exercises, then contact your Physiotherapist for further advice.

Exercise 1 - Wall Slides:

Stand close to a wall. Slide your hand up and down the wall at a steady pace as high as comfortable

Perform 1-2 sets of 8-12 repetitions aiming for slight ache/fatigue

When you can perform this exercise easily you can progress by doing it without the support of the wall and adding a light weight



Exercise 2 - Wall Presses:

Stand facing a wall at arm's length distance with your arms outstretched for a push-up

Slowly bend both elbows bringing your chest towards the wall then return

Perform 1-2 sets of 8-12 repetitions aiming for slight ache/fatigue

When you can perform this exercise easily you can progress and increase the load by moving your feet further away from the wall or perform against a work top

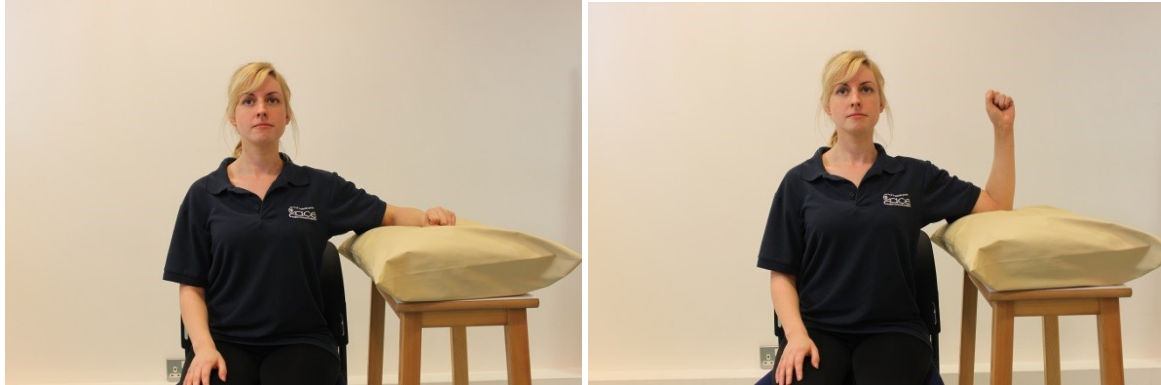


Exercise 3 – Shoulder External Rotation:

Sit next to a table with your elbow supported on a pillow. Make a fist, keep your elbow bent and then rotate your forearm to point upwards before returning slowly to the start position.

Perform 1-2 sets of 8-12 repetitions aiming for slight ache/fatigue

When you can perform this exercise easily you can progress by adding a light weight



Exercise 4 - Cross-Body Arm Stretch:

Support your painful arm across your mid-chest and gently pull with the other arm at the elbow to achieve a stretch feel across the sore shoulder. Avoid if producing a pinching pain in your shoulder

Hold 30 seconds



If you find these exercises too difficult, please refer to the 'Irritable Subacromial Shoulder Pain' Handout first. You can then progress back to this programme as you are able to move forwards with your rehabilitation.