

[Top Six Steps to Save Your Shoulder.](#)

Do you have pain or difficulty with any of the following day to day activities:

- **Taking a shirt off overhead?**
- **Reaching up to hang clothes in your closet?**
- **Reaching behind your back?**
- **Sleeping on your side at night?**
- **Pruning or pulling out weeds in the garden?**
- **Working above shoulder height?**

If you answered YES to any of these questions, this Patient Guide is written for you. It contains accurate and helpful information about shoulder pain based on our experience helping hundreds of people with shoulder problems.

We've organized this information into Six Steps. We have found that most people with shoulder pain need to work through these steps to make a successful recovery.

Let's start at the beginning with Step 1

Step 1: Take Action

Shoulder pain can develop in a number of ways.

Some people recall an initial trigger or injury like starting a lawn mower, reaching for something or falling onto an outstretched hand. For other people there is no clear reason at all for their shoulder pain – it simply started one day.

In almost all cases there is no bruising, swelling or obvious sign of injury. This can be a little confusing and it is easy to ignore the initial symptoms as minor or just part of “getting older.”

Unfortunately, most shoulder problems that start out as minor tend to worsen over time . . .

Taking action and getting help from a trusted professional is your first step to recovery – this could be from your physical therapist, doctor or other health professional. Don't be afraid to ask them if they have seen other patients with your symptoms and history before - if your trusted advisor draws a blank at this question, it may be time to find someone else.

Step 2: Get an accurate diagnosis

The correct treatment for your shoulder pain hinges on knowing what the underlying problem is – you need to match the treatment to the problem to get better. This means getting an accurate diagnosis . . . so how exactly does this happen?

A doctor or physical therapist should take an extensive history of your problem and perform multiple physical exam tests.

Ideally you want your history to match with the findings of a physical examination. If you've had any imaging or scans, this can also verify any shoulder pathology...but it isn't always necessary. When a doctor, physical therapist or shoulder surgeon review and verify these findings and they match one of the common causes of shoulder pain, the diagnosis is likely to be the right one.

The three leading causes of shoulder pain that we see in our practice are:

1. Problems in the neck

2. Impingement of the rotator cuff tendons or biceps tendon

3. Poor posture

These problems are treated very differently to one another, so it's important to get an accurate diagnosis before making any decisions about treatment.

Step 3: Reduce Pain and Inflammation

Once you know the cause of your shoulder pain you can begin the first stage of recovery which is to reduce pain and inflammation. This often involves several strategies working together including gentle exercises, modifying your activities at home, advice on sleeping positions and posture as well as hands on physical therapy.

Various modalities such as laser therapy, electrical stimulation and cold therapy can also help.

Together these strategies should reduce your shoulder pain. For some people their shoulder pain settles within a week, for others it can take several weeks. If you go longer than a few weeks without feeling any improvement, we always review your findings, home activities and exercises to make sure we understand what is happening in your shoulder.

Step 4: Restore Normal Strength and Movement

As your pain settles it is important to restore full strength and movement in your

shoulder and arm. Missing this step is a common mistake and causes a relapse of pain when the person tries to use their shoulder for normal activities. This is especially true for rotator cuff injuries and in our practice we encourage our patients to work hard to restore full strength in their shoulder before returning to normal activities.

If you have Frozen Shoulder (Adhesive capsulitis) the process of restoring full movement and strength can take many months and you need to be very patient with your recovery. We measure your movement accurately to keep you on the right track and ensure you make steady progress over time.

Step 5: Return to Normal Activities

Once you have regained normal movement and strength (or very close to) then you can safely return to all of your normal activities. At this stage we ask “What activities have you avoided because of your shoulder problem, that you want to return to?” Some will say golf, tennis, bowling or working overhead . . . something along those lines.

We then ask that person to take the next month or two and do everything they want to do that they could do before. They keep doing their exercises to get stronger at home. Most come back for their final appointment and have no trouble at all.

Some do have a relapse of their previous symptoms.

We take a look at their key physical findings, home exercise program and check which activities they had trouble with.

This helps us see what else needs to be done for that person to get better.

Step 6: Maintenance

Our shoulders and the muscles that support them are prone to weakness as we move through life - maintaining condition of our shoulder muscles is a simple and effective way of preventing future injuries and problems.

At your final appointment, when you have returned to your normal activities and you are happy with your shoulder, we usually ask you to continue with a few key exercises for maintenance. These are usually done a few days a week and for most people can be done at home with a pair of light weights or some exercise tubing or band. Other people may add their shoulder exercises to their gym program or fitness routine.

What Should I Do Next?

There are different treatment programs for shoulder and rotator cuff pain. Doing the right one to address the cause of your pain results in symptom relief, feeling better and moving better. Doing the wrong one frequently makes the symptoms worse. So...

Don't ignore the problem!

Don't alter your life!

Address the problem by seeking care from one of our physical therapists today!