

# Rotator Cuff Related Shoulder Pain

## Advice and treatment

The rotator cuff is a group of muscles which help control your shoulder joint movement.

If your shoulder movement feels limited by pain, rather than stiffness, it may be due to an irritation with your rotator cuff.

The following advice and exercises may help you manage your pain.

## Signs and symptoms

Your shoulder can become painful for a range of reasons – such as repetitive use or a sports injury - and may generally feel better over time.

The main symptom of rotator cuff strain is a pain in the shoulder of upper arm, which is provoked by certain activities such as putting your arm behind your back lifting objects as well as sleeping on that side.

If your pain persists, a physiotherapist may be able to provide you with more detailed advice, including exercises to help you manage this condition.



You can find out more about shoulder pain from the NHS website

Visit NHS website [nhs.uk/conditions/shoulder-pain/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/shoulder-pain/)

# Treating rotator cuff shoulder pain

Treating the pain may take some time, but here are some ideas which may help:

- Avoid activities which might make the pain worse, or find a different way of doing activities – such as playing tennis underarm for a few weeks
- Anti-inflammatory tablets or gels/creams may be help – please talk to your GP or pharmacist for advice
- Although swelling is unlikely to occur, using ice in the early stages can help with pain
- Use a pillow to support your arm when you're sitting and sleeping


## Exercises

You can try the following gentle exercises to help reduce the pain.

They may be uncomfortable, but only perform them within an acceptable pain limit for you.


If the pain is significantly worse after 24 hours of the exercise then reduce the number of times you do the exercise during the day.

### Stage 1



**SUPPORTED ROTATION**  
Sitting with your elbow resting on a table out to the side or in front of you. Make an arm wrestling/windscreen wiper movement while keeping your elbow in contact with the table. If you find this easy, hold a can of beans or heavier weight.

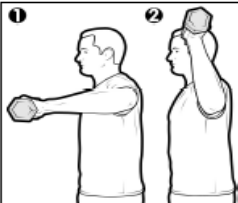
SETS & REPS: 3x10                      FREQUENCY: Daily



**ISOMETRIC EXTERNAL ROTATION**  
With your arm against your side, elbow bent to 90° and wrist in contact with the wall, push the back of your hand against the wall. Ensure no movement occurs. Hold the contraction for 5-10 seconds. Relax and repeat.


SETS & REPS: 3 x 10                      FREQUENCY: Daily

### Stage 2



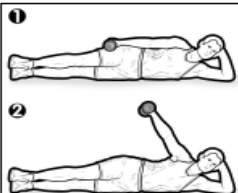
**DUMB-BELL EXTERNAL ROTATION**  
Hold the dumb-bell with your shoulder blade in a 'neutral' position, arm at shoulder-height and elbow bent to 90° (1). From this position, rotate your forearm backwards within a comfortable range (2). Slowly return to the start position and repeat.

SETS & REPS: 3 x 10-12                      FREQUENCY: 4-5 x a week



**DUMB-BELL SHOULDER FLEXION**  
Hold a dumb-bell or weight on your shoulder (palm upwards) (1). Lift weight up towards the ceiling, straightening your elbow (2). Slowly bend your elbow, lowering to start position. Repeat. Aim to progressively increase the weight

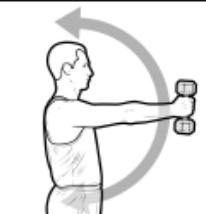
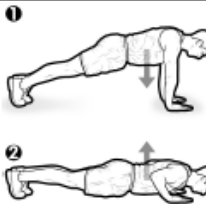
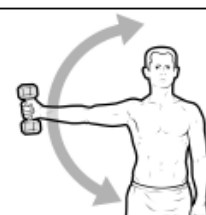
SETS & REPS: 3 x 10                      FREQUENCY: 3-4 x week



**SIDE-LYING DUMB-BELL SHOULDER ABDUCTION**  
Lie on your side with uppermost arm straight holding a dumb-bell in your hand (1). Gently lift your arm away from your body to approximately 60° (2) but within a pain free range. Hold, then gently lower. Repeat. Alternatively raise the arm to 90 degrees and slowly to 45 degrees then return to 90 degrees performing a small arc of movement.

SETS & REPS: 3 x 10                      FREQUENCY: 4-5 x a week

**Stage 3**

|  |  |
|--|--|
|   | <p><b>DUMB-BELL SHOULDER FLEXION</b></p> <p>Holding a dumb-bell at your side with your thumb facing forwards, raise your arm forwards to an acceptable height for you in relation to pain or as instructed. Slowly lower and repeat.</p> <p>SETS &amp; REPS: 3 x 8-10      FREQUENCY: 4-5 a a week</p>   |
|   | <p><b>PRESS-UP</b></p> <p>With your hands a shoulder-width apart and feet on the ground (1) maintain a straight body and neutral spine position as you lower yourself down (2) and push yourself back up to the start position. Repeat. Perform on the knees initially if this is too difficult or painful.</p> <p>SETS &amp; REPS: 3 x 10-12      FREQUENCY: 3-4 x week</p> |
|  | <p><b>DUMB-BELL SHOULDER ABDUCTION</b></p> <p>Holding a dumb-bell at your side with your thumb facing outwards, raise your arm sideways to a an acceptable height for you in relation to your pain or as instructed. Slowly lower and repeat.</p> <p>SETS &amp; REPS: 3 x 8-10      FREQUENCY: 3-4 x week</p>  |

This leaflet is intended to support the advice you've received from your GP and Physiotherapist. Please contact them if you have any further questions.

The exercise diagrams have been created by The Rehab Lab.

Visit Rehab Lab website [TheRehabLab.com/](http://TheRehabLab.com/)

**How to contact us**

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