

Patient information

Physiotherapy for a Stiff Shoulder

Therapies Department

Advice

- Using your arm will not do you any harm and small bouts of gentle activity will help improve the flexibility in your shoulder.
- Using your arm can help reduce muscle spasm and improve movement.
- Use pain medication as advised.
- Use hot packs (through a protective layer to reduce the risk of heat damage or burns) for 20 minutes. This can help reduce pain, reduce stiffness in your shoulder and muscle spasm.
- Wear loose, front fastening tops.
- Place your affected arm in first when dressing.
- Remove your affected arm last when undressing.
- Supporting your affected arm at the elbow can help you use it during daily activities.
- Pace your activity – set goals, take regular breaks, be consistent with activity and spread your activities out. Try and not do too much when you feel good and push yourself to still do things when you don't feel so good. Remember to start low and build up gradually to get fitter, so that in the long run you can do more.

General Exercise

- General exercise can really help your recovery so try to keep going with other activities you enjoy to keep fit.
- If you do not exercise regularly try and build something in – even a brisk 20 minute walk three times a week will help.
- This can help reduce your pain and improve your general health.

Mental Wellbeing

Ongoing pain can be difficult to cope with day-to-day. It can limit your activities, including things you find enjoyable. This can lead to low mood (feeling a bit fed-up, or a bit down). Sometimes low mood can also make your pain feel worse, leading to a cycle of pain and less activity.

There are lots of ways that we can tackle low mood, such as:

- Write a list of all the things you are able to do that you find enjoyable, such as listening to music, talking with friends, going for a walk. Then plan to do a few of these things every day.
- Get as active as you can. We know that even light exercise or activity can help lift our mood.
- If you can, talk about how you are feeling with someone you feel comfortable with, like a relative or a friend.
- Look after yourself by trying to eat healthy meals.
- Try to keep a routine each day with meals and sleeping times.

Goal Setting

- What do you want to do that you can't do now?
- What activity do you want to return to?
- The physiotherapist will ensure your treatment and exercises relate to this.

Joint Mobilisations

- These are movements performed by the therapist to the joints or other structures.
- There are various techniques and can be combined with active movement.
- They can alter the pain signals to and from the brain.
- They can also reduce 'muscle stiffness' in your shoulder, neck and upper back.

Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy involves carrying out exercises and specific physiotherapy techniques in warm water to help relieve pain, relax and strengthen muscles, increase circulation, improving function. This can be an excellent addition to land-based physiotherapy.

Your physiotherapist will assess your suitability for a referral for hydrotherapy.

Exercises

- Reduce pain.
- Maintain the health of the tissues within and around the shoulder.
- Reduce stiffness in the shoulder.

You may only be able to move your arm a small amount at the start, but this will improve over time. A small increase in pain while exercising is okay as long as it starts to settle within one hour and is not worse the next day. If this happens, do not worry, do fewer repetitions the next time and then gradually build up again.

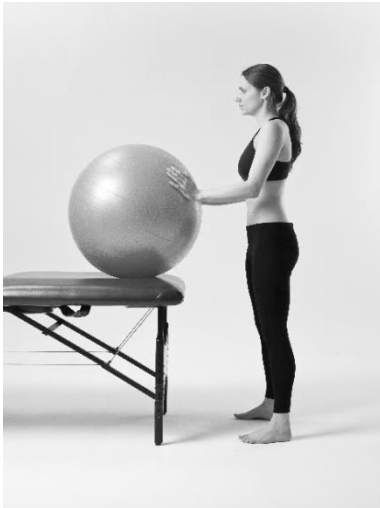
Build the exercises into your daily routine so you can do them regularly.

Find time when you are not under pressure and can give the exercises your full attention.

It can help to keep an exercise diary to record how many repetitions you have done and see how you are progressing.

There are several exercises below which will help stretch and strengthen your tissues and muscles. Your physiotherapist will recommend which are best suited to you.

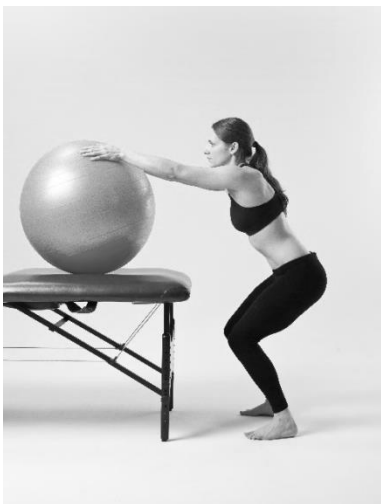
- **Table gym ball flexion**



Standing with one foot in front of the other, facing the table, place your hands or hand of the affected arm on the ball placed on the table. Keeping your hand/s on the ball, roll the ball away from you, transferring your weight from the back to the front leg.

Repeat:

- **Table gym ball flexion squat**



Standing facing the table, place both hands on top of the ball. Bend your knees into a squat position whilst your hands remain on the ball, allowing the ball to roll across the table. Return to your starting position.

Repeat:

- **Table gym ball abduction**

Stand next to the ball on the tabletop with the hand of your affected shoulder resting on the ball. Roll the ball out to the side transferring your weight towards the ball.

Repeat:



- **Table gym ball abduction squat**

Stand next to the ball on the tabletop with the hand of your affected shoulder resting on the ball. Bend your knees into a squat position whilst your hands remain on the ball allowing the ball to roll. Return up to your starting position.

Repeat:



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- **4-point kneeling flexion stretch**

In four-point kneeling (on your hands and knees), place your hands shoulder width apart. Keep your hands still and move your bottom back towards your heels. Hold the stretch for 20-30 seconds.

Repeat:



- **Hand behind back stretch with stick**

In standing with feet hip width apart, place a stick (or a towel) behind your back, with the affected arm at hip height and the unaffected hand behind your head. Use the unaffected hand to pull the affected arm further up your back, applying a stretch at the end of the movement. Return to your starting position.

Repeat:



- **External rotation with stick in lying, arm supported.**

Lying on your back, with neck and affected arm supported using pillows/towels. Hold the stick, shoulder width apart with your elbows bent to 90°. Keep your elbows tucked in, use your unaffected hand to gently push the stick towards the affected side, applying a gentle stretch at the end of the movement. Return to your starting position.

Repeat:



- **External rotation with stick in sitting**

In sitting, maintaining a good posture, place a folded or rolled up towel between the affected arm and your side, or resting your elbow on a table. Hold a stick with both hands, shoulder width apart. Keeping your elbow tucked in, use your unaffected arm to push the stick outwards away from the affected arm, applying a gentle stretch at the end of the movement. Return to your starting position.

Repeat:



- **Wall slides**

Standing with a good posture facing the wall. Slide your hands up the wall, keeping in contact with the wall throughout the movement. Continue as high as comfortable feeling a gentle stretch at the top of the movement. Return to your starting position keeping your hands on the wall throughout the movement.

Repeat:



- **Butterfly wall clock**

Start with your knees slightly flexed in a squat position. Facing the wall, maintaining a good posture. Hands on the wall, thumbs crossed, affected side on top. Slide your hands to 12 o'clock and back to your starting position. Then repeat to 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock.

Repeat:



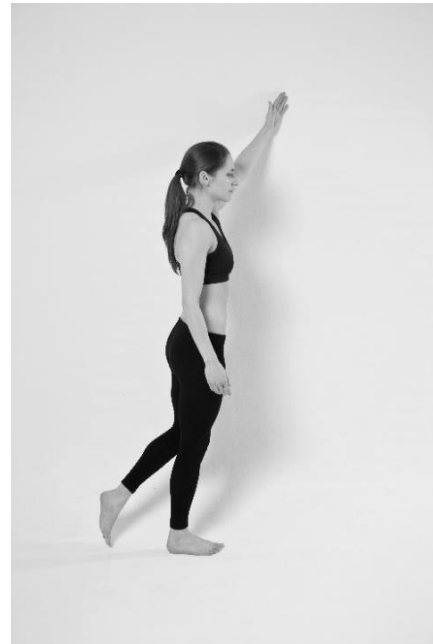
- **Lateral wall slide with step forward**

Standing tall, side on to a wall. Affected arm next to the wall. Bend your elbow and apply a gentle pressure against the wall with the back of your hand. Step forward and whilst maintaining this gentle pressure, slide your arm upwards against the wall into elevation.

Alternative:

Assist with your opposite hand under the elbow.

Repeat:



- **Pectoralis stretch in a doorway**

Stand in a doorway with your forearm resting on the door frame and your elbow and shoulder at 90° or 120°. Maintain a good posture and face forwards throughout. Take a small step forwards (with the leg on the side you are stretching) whilst keeping your forearm relaxed and resting on the door frame. You should feel a stretch on the front of your chest. Hold for twenty-thirty seconds.

Repeat:



- **Thoracic extension over a chair**

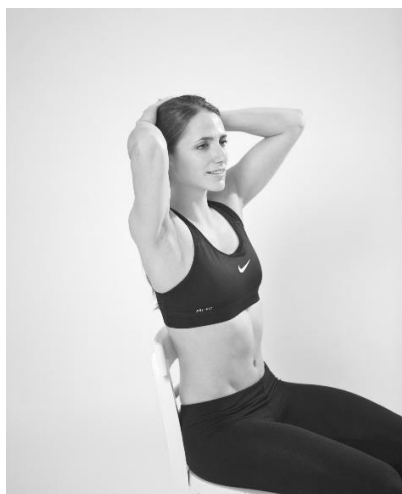
Sitting in a chair, place both hands behind your head to support your head and neck. Lean back over the chair, feel as stretch in your mid back.

You can stretch different areas of your mid back by sliding your bottom forwards in the chair.

Adaptation easier: alternative:

If you are unable to put your hands behind your head, place them across your chest, or use the unaffected arm only.

Repeat:

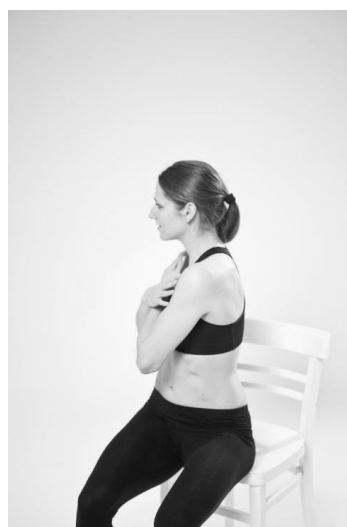
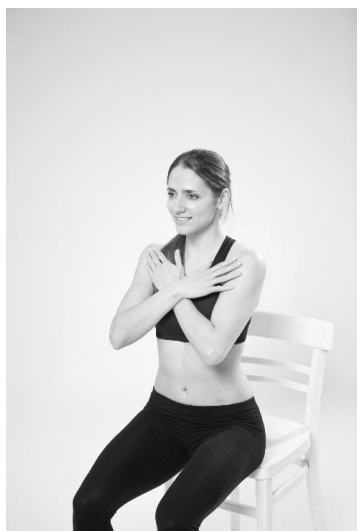


- **Thoracic rotational Stretch**

In sitting cross your arms across your chest. Keeping your hips and pelvis still twist your body to the right, feeling a stretch in your mid back. Repeat, turning towards your left until you feel a stretch in your mid back.

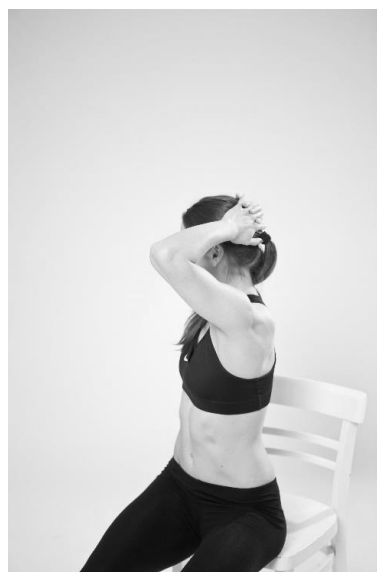
To add a further stretch, reach round for the back of the chair and pull round gently.

Repeat:



Adaptation intermediate: alternative:

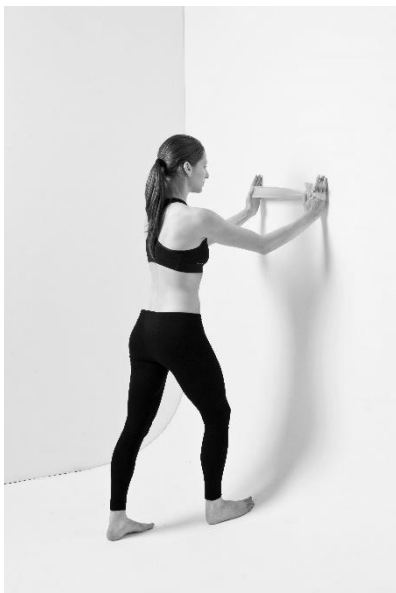
Place your hands behind your head.



- **Wall Slides with resistance band loop**

Step standing with good posture facing the wall. Loop a resistance band around your hands/wrists with your little fingers placed on the wall. Slide your hands up the wall, transferring your weight from the back foot to the front foot. Keep in contact with the wall throughout the movement, gently pushing out into the resistance band. Return to your starting position.

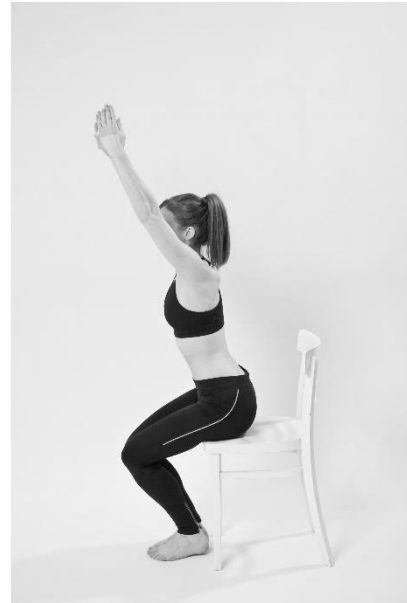
Repeat:



- **Standing to sitting taking the arms into elevation with resistance band loop**

Stand in front of a chair. Place a loop of resistance band around your hands keeping the elbows bent. Gently push out with the backs of the hands against the resistance band to activate the muscles in the back of your shoulder. As you sit onto the chair take both arms up into full elevation. Return to your starting position keeping the resistance on the band throughout the movement.

Repeat:



- **Step up with resistance band loop**

Stand facing a step. Place one foot on the step, and a loop of resistance band around your hands gently pushing out. Hands facing each other, keeping your arms out in front of you with your elbows bent to 90°. Maintain this outward force as you step forwards onto the step. At the same time straighten both arms lifting them up and out to the side finishing in a 'V' above your head. Return to your starting position and change legs.

Repeat:



- **4-point kneeling lateral glides with resistance band loop**

Kneeling on your hands and knees, place a loop of resistance band around your hands. Using a towel/duster slide your unaffected hand on the floor away against the resistance and return to your starting position.

Repeat:

Then, repeat this with the affected hand.

Repeat:



- **External rotation with resistance band**

In standing, maintain a good posture. Affected arm against your side, elbow at 90°. Hold the resistance band, pull your hand out against the resistance, keeping your elbow in position. Return to your starting position.

Repeat:

Tip: Place a towel between your arm and side to help position your arm throughout the exercise.

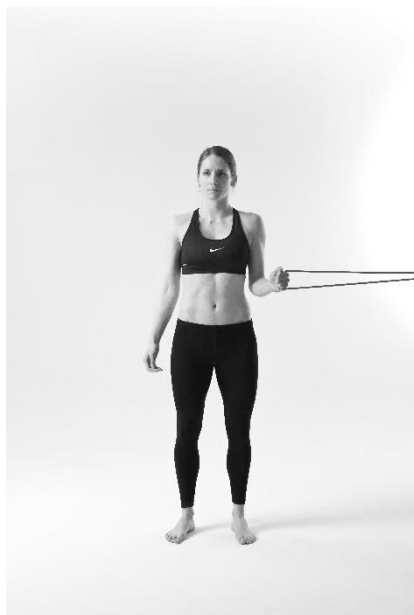


- **Internal rotation with resistance band**

In standing, maintain a good posture. Affected arm against your side, elbow at 90°. Hold the resistance band, pull your hand across your body against the resistance, keeping your elbow in position. Return to your starting position.

Repeat:

Tip: Place a towel between your arm and side to help position your arm throughout the exercise.

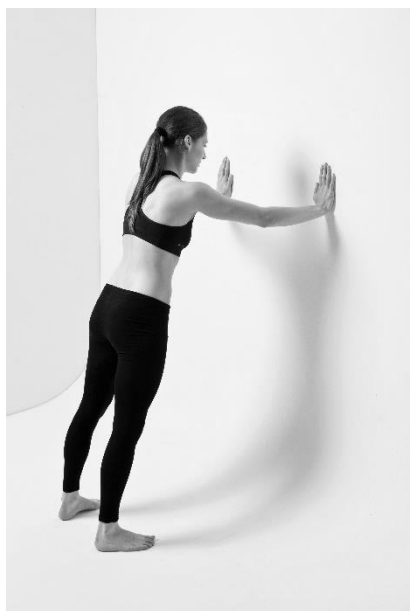


- **Wall press up**

Stand feet hip width apart with your hands on the wall. Maintain a good posture. Bend your elbows to 90° lowering your body to the wall. Return to your starting position

Alternative: Perform a wall press up with a resistance band loop, on tension, around your wrists.

Repeat:



- **Spiderman**

Start in a gently squat if able. Hands flat on the wall inside a looped resistance band, pushing it apart. Keep tension on against the band and walk your hands up the wall as high as you can reach. Straighten your legs. Return to your starting position.

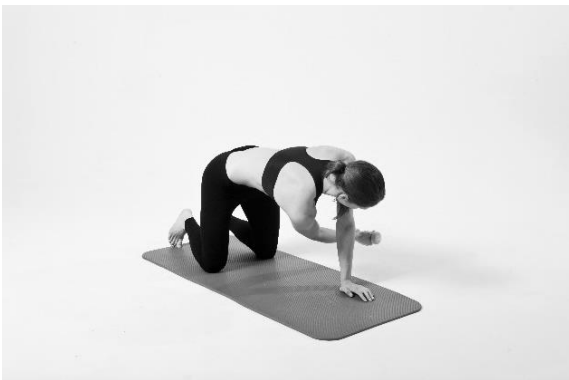
Repeat:



Thread the needle with weight

In four-point kneeling with a weight in the affected hand “thread” the arm holding the weight underneath your supporting arm, letting your body twist as you do so. Keep your weight as evenly distributed as possible on your supporting limbs. Once you have reached as far as you can go, take the weighted arm back and lift it behind you as far as you comfortably can, letting your body twist in the other direction.

Repeat:



Sword / Lawnmower with resistance band

Start in a rotated lunge position, holding a resistance band in both hands. Move in a diagonal pattern, by stepping back to transfer your weight onto the affected side and take your arm up and out as high as comfortable. Hold and slowly return to the starting position by reversing the movement.

Repeat:



Isolated posterior cuff in sitting

Sitting tall with your elbow supported on a table. Maintain your shoulder blade control and slowly rotate your arm backwards.

Progression:

Hold a weight in your hand.

Take your arm into 90° abduction.

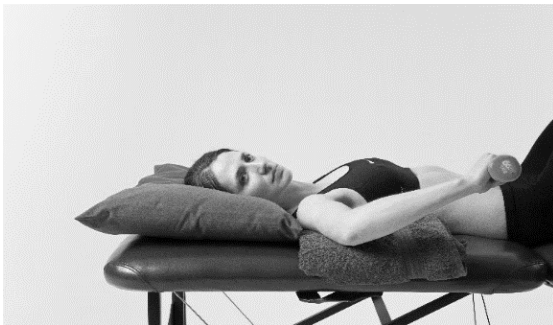


Eccentric shoulder external rotation in supine with a weight

Lie on your back with your arm supported fully to the elbow with a towel. Place your shoulder in 90° abduction and your elbow bent to 90°. Hold a small weight in your hand. Maintain your shoulder blade against the bed and keep it controlled.

Slowly externally rotate your arm backwards. Then repeat the opposite way into internal rotation, ensuring your shoulder blade does not compensate and move too.

Repeat:



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Feedback

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Further information

You can access videos for the exercises from the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-DY7WyugV4Ffohp_2lZPugx1FSDt8FS0

If you feel your mood is not improving, or may be getting worse, then it is worth talking to your GP about it, or you can contact Talk Liverpool directly yourself on 0151 228 2300 or www.merseycare.nhs.uk/our-services/liverpool/talking-therapies

Useful Websites

<https://www.shoulderdoc.co.uk>

<https://bess.ac.uk/>

Therapies Department:

Royal & Broadgreen Hospital: 0151 706 2760

Textphone no: 18001 0151 706 2760

Aintree Hospital: 0151 529 3335

Textphone no: 18001 0151 529 3335

Author: Therapies Department

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