

Patient Home Exercises for Adhesive Capsulitis (aka Frozen Shoulder)

When deciding on exercises for your frozen shoulder, one way to think about what will work is to visualize what you would do if you had knots in a necklace chain. If you ever tried to undo knots in delicate chains, you know that going in and doing major tugging right off the bat doesn't work: It often just tightens the knot even more.

You usually have to make gentle small tugs to the various sides of the knots until some of them start to loosen up and break free: Gentle, small tugging movements worked best at first to try to regain some initial movement – when exercising gentle straining is fine, pain is not!

Shoulder Circles - start out with very small circles just to free up your shoulders a little bit. At first only very small circles will be achievable without pain. Do a few minutes on each side several times a day following your massage session

Arm Circles - these will be least painful when done lying on one side and it also put less tension on the shoulder to bend the arm rather than keeping it out straight. So lie on the floor or bed on one side and bend your upper arm so that your hand is placed on your shoulder. Then make little circle movements in the air with your elbow.

Again start out with very small circles and then make them bigger and bigger as your shoulder frees up. You can vary this by making other shapes in the air - figure eights, letters of the alphabet, etc. - anything to try to get the shoulder muscles freed up and moving again into their full range of motion.

Eventually you can progress to doing arm circles standing up and with your arms out straight, but it will take awhile to get to this point!

Once you are comfortable with the above, you can add the exercises below. So as not to overdo it (and get bored) do a different selection each day.

*Please Note: The goal of the exercises below is to stretch the shoulder to the point of tension but **not pain**. Severe discomfort is unusual and suggests overstretching. Do not overdo it!*

Weighted pendulum stretching exercise is used to restore flexibility to the shoulder joint. The exercise is performed as follows:

- Relax your shoulder muscles.
- While standing or sitting, hold a 5- to 10-pound weight in your hand (a filled gallon container weighs 8 pounds) and keep your arm vertical and close to your body (bending over too far may pinch the rotator cuff tendons).
- Allow your arm to swing back and forth or in a small diameter circle (no greater than 12 inches (30 centimeters) in diameter).

This exercise should be performed after applying heat to the affected shoulder for five minutes once or twice a day. As your symptoms improve, the diameter of swing may be increased somewhat.

A properly performed pendulum stretch exercise may cause a deep, ache or pain in the armpit or down the inner aspect of the arm.

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Passive stretching exercises are performed after the pendulum stretch exercise. These exercises, performed once or twice a day for several months, should further loosen the tightened shoulder lining and restore normal range of motion. Sets of 10 to 20 of the following three exercises can be performed daily:

A weight of 2-4kg is held *lightly* in the hand (relax your grip!). The muscles of the shoulder should be relaxed! The arm is kept vertical and close to the body (bending over too far may cause pinching of the rotator cuff tendons). The arm is allowed to swing back and forth or in a small circle (no greater than 12 inches (30 centimeters) in diameter). A properly performed stretching exercise may cause a deep achy sensation, either in the armpit or down the inner aspect of the arm. This exercise can be performed just as effectively while sitting. *Courtesy of Bruce C Anderson, MD*



Armpit stretch — Use your good arm to lift the affected arm onto a shelf, dresser, or any object about breast high. Gently bend at the knees, opening up the arm pit. Try to push the arm up a little farther with each stretch.



Finger walk — Face a wall about three quarters of an arm length away. Using only your fingers (not your shoulder muscles) raise your arm up to shoulder level.



Towel stretch — Take a three foot long towel, grasp it with both hands, and hold it at a 45 degree angle. Use the upper, good arm to pull the arm toward the lower back. This can be repeated with the towel in the horizontal position.



Wand exercises

- A. **Flexion:** Stand upright and hold a stick in both hands, palms down. Stretch your arms by lifting them over your head, keeping your elbows straight. Hold for 5 seconds and return to the starting position. Repeat 10 times.
- B. **Extension:** Stand upright and hold a stick in both hands behind your back. Move the stick away from your back. Hold the end position for 5 seconds. Relax and return to the starting position. Repeat 10 times.
- C. **External rotation:** Lie on your back and hold a stick in both hands, palms up. Your upper arms should be resting on the floor, your elbows at your sides and bent 90°. Using your good arm, push your injured arm out away from your body while keeping the elbow of the injured arm at your side. Hold the stretch for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.
- D. **Internal rotation:** Stand upright holding a stick with both hands behind your back. Place the hand on your uninjured side behind your head grasping the stick, and the hand on your injured side behind your back at your waist. Move the stick up and down your back by bending your elbows. Hold the bent position for 5 seconds and then return to the starting position. Repeat 10 times.
- E. **Shoulder abduction and adduction:** Stand upright and hold a stick with both hands, palms down. Rest the stick against the front of your thighs. While keeping your elbows straight, use your good arm to push your injured arm out to the side and up as high as possible. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

Scapular range of motion: Stand and shrug your shoulders up and hold for 5 seconds. Then squeeze your shoulder blades back and together and hold 5 seconds. Next, pull your shoulder blades downward as if putting them in your back pocket. Relax. Repeat this sequence 10 times.

Pectoralis stretch: Stand in a doorway or corner with both arms on the wall slightly above your head. Slowly lean forward until you feel a stretch in the front of your shoulders. Hold 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

Biceps stretch: Stand facing a wall (about 6 inches away from the wall). Raise your arm out to your side and place the thumb side of your hand against the wall (palm down). Keep your elbow straight. Rotate your body in the opposite direction of the raised arm until you feel a stretch in your biceps. Hold 15 seconds, repeat 3 times.

(Source: patients.uptodate.com and fairview.org/healthlibrary, June 2007)

You might also like to review the videos at:

http://orthopedics.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1/XJ/Ya&sdn=orthopedics&cdn=health&tm=8&gps=121_10_1020_599&f=00&su=p247.2.140.ip_p284.8.150.ip_&tt=14&bt=0&bts=0&zu=http%3A//www.orthop.washington.edu/uw/tabID__3422/Default.aspx