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The Stiff Shoulder: Shoulder Range of Motion Exercises

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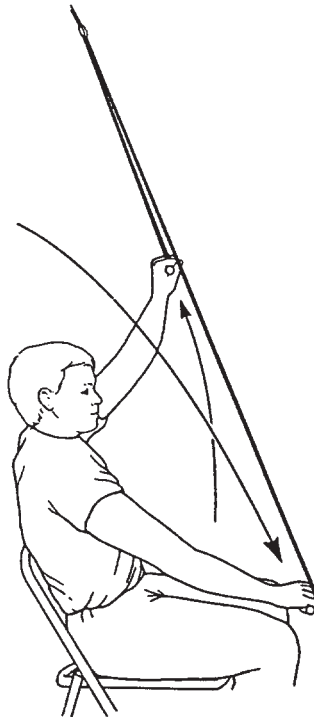
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Patient Information Series

Shoulder Stiffness

Stiffness is very debilitating, causing pain and dysfunction. Many complain of pain at rest and with use of the arm. All are limited in activities due to diminished motion across their body, difficulty sleeping, reaching overhead, across the body, and behind the back to tuck in their shirt.

Causes Of Shoulder Stiffness

1. **“Adhesive Capsulitis” or a “Frozen Shoulder”** comes on gradually for no apparent reason. Generally, it is “self limited”, in that it should eventually resolve over time (often 6 months - 2 years).
2. **“Post-Traumatic Shoulder Stiffness”** Immobilization of the shoulder linked to a specific injury or surgery, (e.g., holding the arm in a sling for several weeks following a shoulder dislocation or fracture, a person not moving or using the shoulder for several weeks after an injury because of pain or fear of further injury).
3. **Calcific tendonitis** A calcium deposit that forms in the rotator cuff tendon and can become extremely painful.
4. **Partial thickness rotator cuff** tear can be quite painful and can cause loss of motion.
5. **Full thickness or complete rotator cuff tears** can cause reduced shoulder motion. Stiffness can be present with a full thickness rotator cuff tear, but the tear often does not cause the stiffness. Repairing the tear alone often causes greater stiffness. Stiffness must be addressed first and motion restored *before* the tear is repaired.
6. **Shoulder fracture** may lead to a bony block to shoulder motion.

Treatment - Stretching

Stretching is ordered by the physician, may be monitored by a physical therapist, but the patient is in charge. The patient should perform their stretching exercises up to *five* times every day. The patient is “their own best therapist” and can feel the point when a stretch occurs. It is important to remember that shoulder stiffness is the main problem and flexibility must be addressed before emphasis is placed on strengthening.

Stretching Exercises

1) Forward elevation, 2) External rotation, 3) Internal rotation behind the back. 4) Cross body adduction. Perform slowly and when the arm reaches a position where motion becomes limited, an attempt should be made to relax the muscles and gain a few more degrees of motion. At the point of maximum motion, the arm should be held for a count of thirty. Each of the described exercises should be performed *five* times during each session with up to *five* sessions done each day. These exercises can be performed anywhere, anytime. The exercise should only be performed to the point of maximum stretch, just before the point of pain. If the shoulder is significantly irritated, the stretching intensity should be reduced so that all sessions can be done.

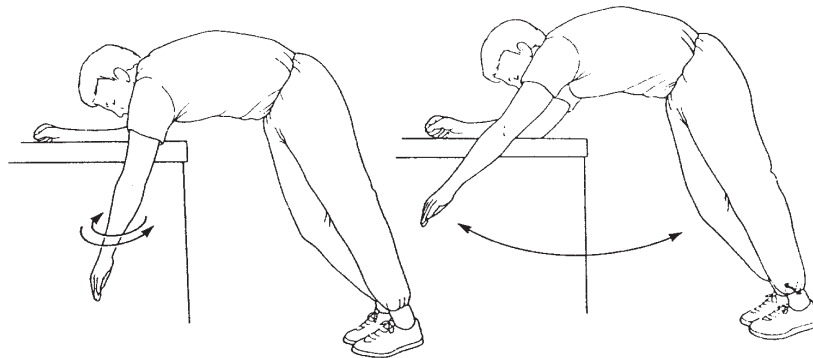
Other Treatments (Be Patient!)

It may take *several weeks* for the exercises to show results. A few may suffer from persistent stiffness despite diligent therapy. This may be secondary to severe scarring or another underlying problem that is limiting rehabilitation. At this point manipulation or surgery may be indicated. This may involve a gentle push to free the joint, arthroscopic release, or in rare cases open surgical excision of dense scar tissue.

Stretching Exercises

Pendulum Exercise

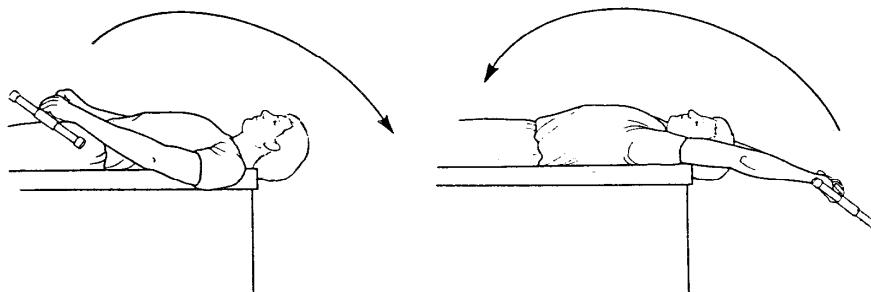
Lean over a table and let the involved arm hang down. Swing the arm in circles clockwise, then counter-clockwise, then in a pendulum motion forward and back.



The following exercises can be done with a T-bar (as shown in the pictures), a cane, or any other stick such as a broom or mop handle. Each movement should be done slowly, holding the position for five seconds, and repeated 10-15 times.

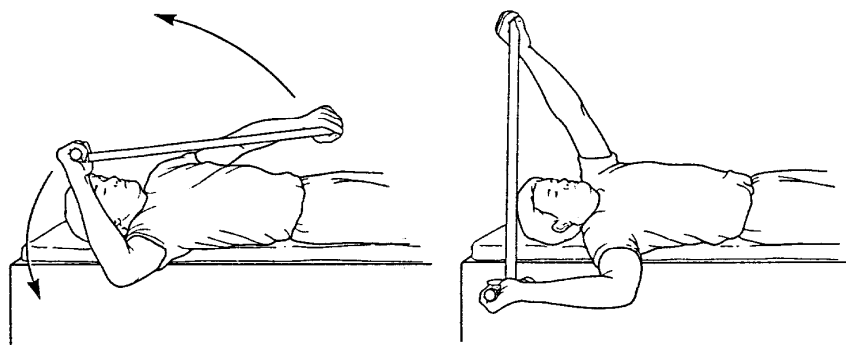
Supine Flexion

Lie on your back, hold the stick with both hands with arms straight, raise both arms overhead as far as possible.



Supine External Rotation

Lie on your back with the involved arm out to the side of your body and bend your elbow about 90°. Use the opposite arm to push the involved arm into external rotation, keeping the elbow fixed at a right angle.



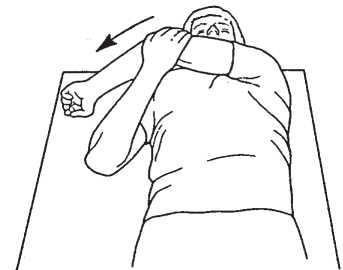
Standing Internal Rotation

Place the involved arm behind your buttocks and grasp one end of the stick. With the opposite hand reach behind the back and pull the stick upward, thereby causing the involved arm to internally rotate.



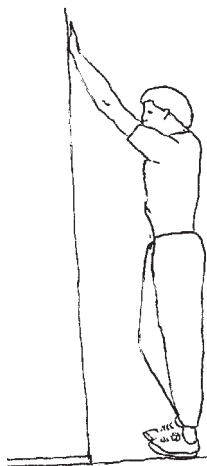
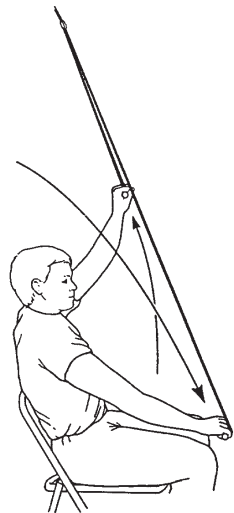
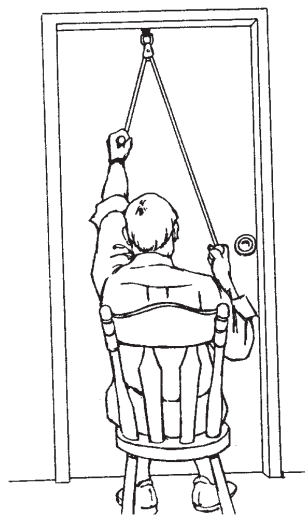
Supine Cross Body Adduction

Lie down, grasp the elbow of your involved arm with your opposite hand and pull the involved arm across the front of your chest.



Rope and Pulley

Place pulley system in doorway, and use the good arm to help elevate the involved arm as high as possible. Start by facing the door, and, as your motion improves, face away from the door.



Wall Climb

Stand facing the wall, lay your palm on the wall, slowly walk toward the wall and use your fingers to help slide the hand upwards on the wall. Continue until the shoulder has maximum tolerable stretch, and hold for 30 seconds. Repeat once.