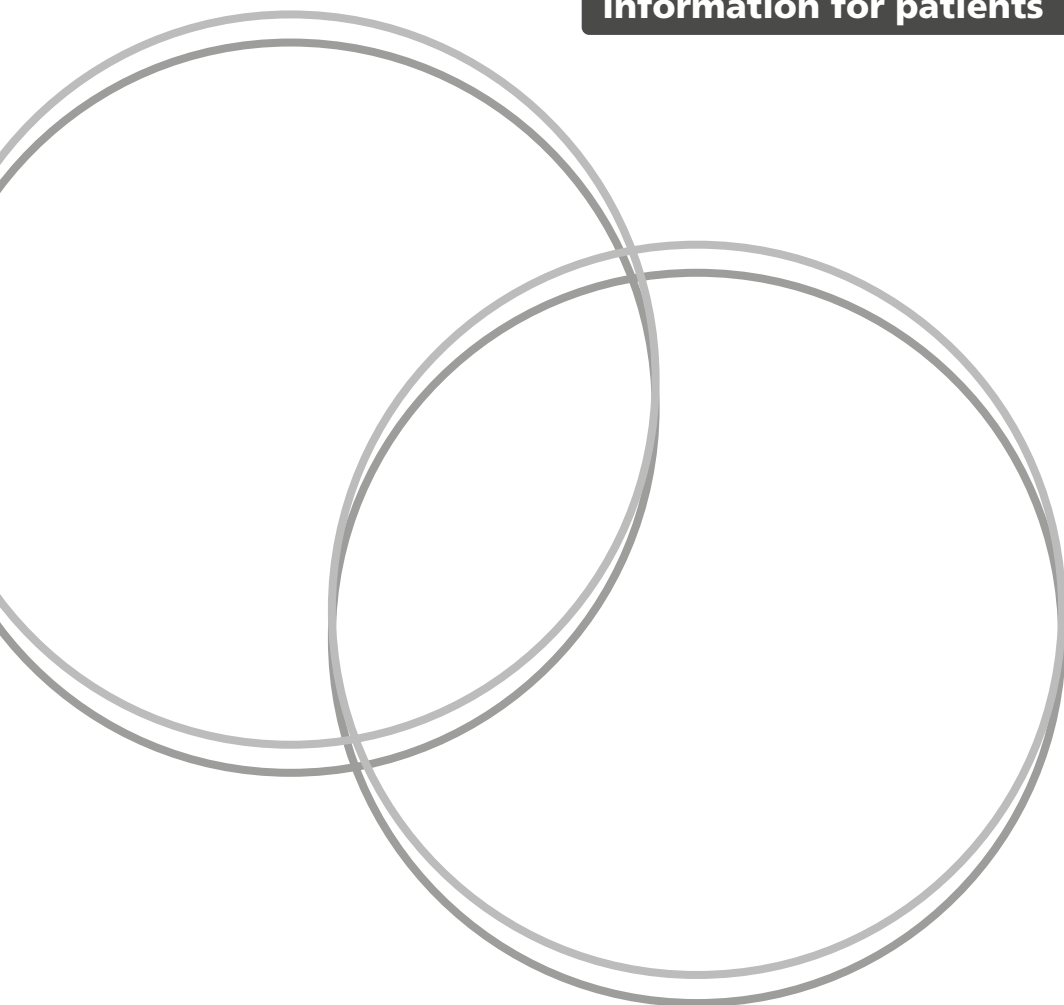




Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Rotator Cuff Tear Rehabilitation Programme

Information for patients



This booklet is to help you understand the problem you have with your shoulder and improve the movement and function. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice and should be used alongside any information and treatment you are given at the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

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What is a rotator cuff tear and what can I do to help?

A rotator cuff tear is very common and often found in people over the age of 50. Many do not know it is there and will have no problems with their shoulder at all.

Research has shown us that those who have a rotator cuff tear and shoulder pain can have a good outcome without the need for any surgery. Even though the tear remains it is possible to reduce the pain and increase the movement in your shoulder by doing certain exercises. We have found that surgery for anyone over the age of 70 is not effective due to the condition of the muscles and tendons around the shoulder joint.

This booklet and the exercise programme will:

- Explain how and why it is still possible to get a good outcome without surgery.
- Reduce your shoulder pain.
- Increase the movement and strength in your shoulder.

What is the rotator cuff?

- A group of four muscles and their tendons in the shoulder.
- The tendons connect muscles to bone.
- The muscles attach the shoulder blade to the arm bone.
- These muscles work with other muscles to move your shoulder joint especially when your arm is above your head or when you are lifting or carrying a weight.

Pain management

Even though a rotator cuff tear remains, the pain in your shoulder often improves with a combination of exercise, pain relief, heat, injections and rest.

Try different resting positions at night;

1. When lying on your back, place a folded towel or pillow under your upper arm.
2. When lying on your good side, place a pillow or two in front of you so that your painful arm cannot drop across your body.



3. When sitting, try propping your arm up on a cushion.



Moving your shoulder is usually the best way to try and reduce the pain and improve the movement in your arm. If you do not move your arm the situation is likely to stay the same. Try to move your arm as much as possible within what you feel is an acceptable level of pain during and after exercise. This is usually about 4 on the pain scale where 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain imaginable. Activities and movements that increase your pain above this level will not cause any further damage to the tendons.

Exercises

Research has shown that exercise is effective in reducing the pain and increasing the movement in your arm.

We know it can take at least twelve weeks for the benefits of exercises to start to show. This is because the muscles around your shoulder will be weak and you will have to use them regularly over a long time to see or feel any improvement. Stopping your exercises too soon may mean that you have not given your shoulder the best chance of improvement. The exercises aim to work all of the muscles around your shoulder, not just the rotator cuff muscles. These other muscles will help to support your shoulder.

Stretching exercises

These gentle exercises will help to improve the movement in your arm.

Remember

- Do the exercises once or twice a day
- If you have discomfort, keep the pain at a manageable level (around 4 out of 10).

Shoulder Roll Exercise

- Sit or stand
- Keep your arms relaxed by your sides
- Roll your shoulders forwards
- Roll shoulders backwards
- Relax
- Repeat 5 times



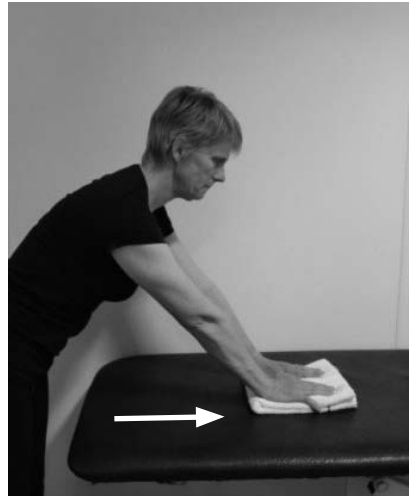
Elbow Exercise

- Stand up.
- Straighten your arm down by your side, palm facing forwards.
- Bend your elbow bringing your hand up towards your shoulder.
- Straighten your elbow.
- Repeat 5 times.



Worktop Slides

- Sit or stand facing a flat surface at waist height e.g. a table or work surface.
- Place both hands on something that will slide easily e.g. a towel.
- If standing, bend your knees slightly and let your arms slide forwards, at the same time push your bottom away from the table.
- Slide your hands back towards you and stand up or sit up straight again.
- As you repeat, try and stretch further forwards.
- Repeat 5 times.



Outward hand rotations

- Sit back in a chair and bend your elbows to right angles.
- Place a towel in between your elbow and waist on the affected side.
- Using both hands, hold a stick, pole or umbrella with your palms facing upwards.
- Use the stick to push your hand, on the affected side, outwards whilst keeping your elbow pressed lightly against the towel.
- Your hand should now be outside your elbow.
- Return back to the start position.
- Do the movement gently, use the stick rather than your muscles to move your hand on the affected side.
- Feel a gentle stretch around your shoulder, hold the stretch for 20 seconds.
- Relax and repeat 3-5 times.

If this movement is painful rather than stretchy – do not continue with this exercise.



Strengthening exercises

These exercises can be carried out along with the stretching exercises shown previously.

The following exercises aim to strengthen the muscles around your shoulder and will help reduce pain with daily activities. They will start with the easier ones at the beginning, becoming more difficult as you improve.

It is a good sign if the exercise feels difficult or the arm is difficult to control. It means that the muscles are working and will be getting stronger. We would encourage you to keep going with them as they will slowly get stronger over a long period of time.

As the exercises become easier try the next one, or do them in a different position, firstly in sitting and then in standing.

The number of repetitions is given as a guide only. You may find that your muscles get tired and that you will have to slowly build up the number of times you can do each exercise. For example start with 3-5 repetitions. Sensations of hard work, stiffness and muscle ache are all expected and will tend to improve over 6-8 weeks.

It is best if you do these exercises once every day. You will need to do them at least four times a week to make a difference.

You can use the record sheet to note down how many exercises you are doing. This is printed at the end of the booklet.

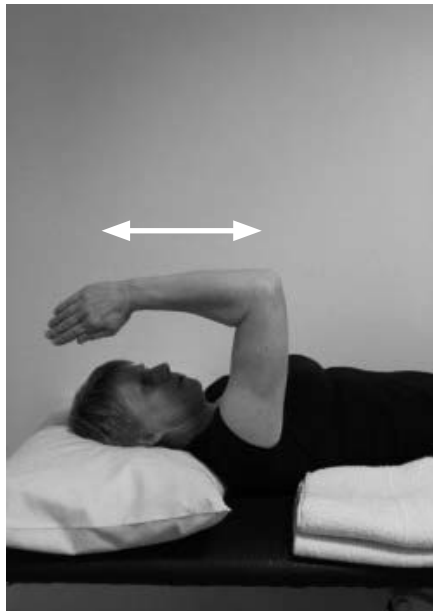
Starting Position

- Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat (on the floor or your bed), and a pillow under your head.
- Place a folded towel under your upper arm (between your elbow and your shoulder) on the affected side.
- Use your good arm to lift your affected arm up in the air by placing your hand from the good arm onto the elbow of the affected arm, keeping the elbow bent.
- Keep your affected arm as relaxed as possible. It will feel very heavy to lift.
- You are ready to start.



Arm swaying exercises

- Try and keep this position (tip of your elbow pointing to the ceiling and your arm bent to 90°) as you let go with the other hand. You should keep your arm as close to your body as possible. Sway your elbow gently backwards and forwards.
- Rest the shoulder muscles by holding the affected arm with your opposite hand again.
- Aim to repeat this balancing and swaying movement 10 times and build it up to 3 lots of 10.
- Progress this exercise by straightening your elbow and doing the same swaying movement.



Progression: elbow straight sways or circles



Controlling your arm movement overhead

- Get into the starting position with the arm up in front of you, let go with the good arm. You may need to experiment with your elbow or hand in different positions to find the 'best route' for you to get your arm overhead. **(a)** There is not a right or wrong way. If you find a good way to get your arm up overhead then continue to do it like that.
- Move the arm so you are trying to reach backwards over your head, towards the pillow, keeping your elbow close to your ear. **(b)**

- You may only be able to move a small amount to begin with.
- Return your arm back to the start position up in front of you.
(c) As you get better at this you can gradually lower your arm so that it rests back down by your side.
- Aim to repeat this 10 times and build up to 3 lots of 10.

a)



b)



c)



If it is painful to lower your arm you can use the hand of your good arm to support the elbow of the affected arm and help lower the affected arm down.

When you start to lower your arm, push the elbow of the affected arm into the hand of the good arm to help lower it down.

Over time you may find you can reduce the pressure and eventually will require no help from your good arm.



If this exercise becomes easy you can progress it by holding a small weight in your hand, a tin of beans or a 500ml bottle of water. Choose a weight that you can control. Gradually increase the weight up to 1.5kg (3lbs). Always keep the pain at a manageable level.



Sitting and Standing Exercises

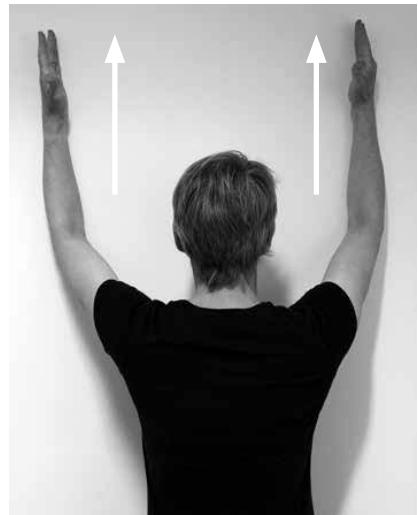
Armpit squeezes

- In sitting, place a folded towel under the arm pit, of your affected arm.
- Keep your elbow bent.
- Gently squeeze the towel into your side. Hold the squeeze for 5 seconds.
- Relax.
- Repeat 3-5 times.



Wall Slides

- Stand facing the wall.
- Slide your affected hand up the wall supporting and helping it with your good arm.
- Some people find it helpful to bend your knees a little and then straighten them as this helps to slide your arm up the wall.
- Stretch your hand up as high as is comfortable then slide it down. If it is painful lowering your arm, try resisting the movement so that you are pushing down against the pressure of the other arm. Over a period of weeks you may find that you can gradually reduce the amount of resistance that you are giving.
- Repeat 10 times and build it up to do 3 lots of 10.
- Progress this exercise by reducing the help given by your good arm. Eventually try and slide your arm up and down the wall with no help. You could also try lifting your hand off the wall when the arm is overhead.



Hands linked arm lifts

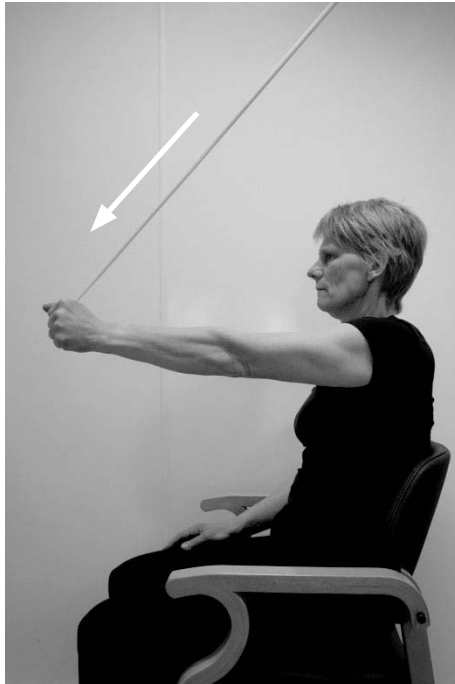
- You can lie on your back, sit or stand for these exercises, try not to lean backwards.
- Link your hands together in front of your belly button.
- Start with your elbows bent and then 'float' your hands up towards the ceiling, aiming to straighten your arms – imagine you have 100 helium balloons attached to the fingers.
- Lower your arms by bending your elbows and bringing your elbow into your side.
- If able gradually reduce the amount of help, on the way up, that you are giving the affected arm.
- Try and find the painless route, experiment with your elbow and hand at slightly different angles.
- Build to 10 times and progress to 3 lots of 10.
- You are aiming to eventually move your affected arm up and down by itself. To progress this exercise add a small weight. You may find there is a point beyond which you cannot increase the weight. **STOP** when you get to this stage.



Band Pull Downs

You can do this exercise sitting or standing. You will need a piece of resistance band to complete this exercise and will be advised by your physiotherapist whether this is appropriate for you.

- Tie your band to a firm point, for example a banister rail high up behind you, so that when sitting or standing with your back to the tied band, your arm can move above your head and out in front of you.
- Hold the end of the band in your hand on the affected arm and pull down towards the floor.
- Slowly, let your arm come back up over your head.
- Repeat 10 times and aim to build up to 3 lots of 10.



Using your arm for daily activities

We expect that by working through this rehabilitation programme, the pain in your shoulder will ease and the movement and strength will improve.

Whilst following the exercise programme it is important to continue to use your arm for daily activities.

These daily activities may cause some pain but should be at a level of pain that is acceptable during or after the activity.

You may find these daily activities will become easier to do. Please continue with your exercises.

It may be that you still have a restriction to some movements, and you may need to continue to modify your lifestyle.

However, if you have completed these exercises for at least twelve weeks they will have helped to strengthen the muscles around your shoulder.

Some people continue to keep doing some of the exercises on a regular basis for many months or years, others find they do not need to do so. If you have found them helpful, keep this booklet in a safe place for future use.

Contact Details

If you have any problems or questions at any stage in your rehabilitation, please ask your physiotherapist for advice.

Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Windmill Road
Headington
Oxford
OX3 7LD

Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre Physiotherapy Reception:
01865 738 074

Trauma Service

John Radcliffe Hospital
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Headley way
Oxford
OX3 9DU

John Radcliffe Trauma Service Physiotherapy Reception:
01865 221 540

Horton General Hospital

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Oxford Road
Banbury
OX16 9AL

Physiotherapy Reception:
01295 229432

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
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