

Osteoarthritis of the Shoulder

(Inflammation of the shoulder joint)

Information and Exercise Leaflet for Patient's and Carers

What is osteoarthritis?

Arthritis means inflammation of the joints. Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis in the UK. OA mainly affects the joint cartilage and the bone tissue next to the cartilage.

What causes osteoarthritis?

All normal joints and joint tissues are constantly undergoing some form of repair because of the wear and tear that is placed on them through our daily activities. However, in some people, it seems that this repair process becomes faulty in some way (perhaps because of severe wear and tear to the joints or a problem with the repair process) and OA develops. In joints with OA, the joint cartilage becomes damaged and worn. The bone tissue next to the cartilage can also be affected and bony growths can develop around the joint edges. These growths are called osteophytes and may be seen on X-rays. The joints and the surrounding tissues can also become inflamed. This inflammation is called synovitis.

Factors that may play a role in the development of OA include:

- **Age:** OA becomes more common with increasing age. By the age of 65, at least half of people will have some OA in some joint(s).
- **Genetics:** There may be some inherited tendency for OA to develop in some people.
- **Obesity:** Shoulder OA is more likely to develop, or be more severe, if you use your arms for weight-bearing e.g. pushing up from a chair or using walking aids.
- **Your sex:** Women are more likely to develop OA than men.
- **Previous joint injury, damage or deformity:** This may include previous joint infection, a previous fracture (break in the bone) around a joint, or a previous ligament injury that caused a joint to become unstable.
- **Occupation/Sport:** Shoulder issues are more prevalent with people who use their arms above shoulder height in a repetitive or sustained way, especially when heavier loads are involved.
- **Posture:** Becoming stooped and round shouldered puts more stress on the shoulder joint when performing normal movements.

What are the symptoms of osteoarthritis?

- In some cases no symptoms may occur. Quite a number of people can have X-ray changes that indicate some degree of OA but have no, or only very mild, symptoms.
- Pain, stiffness, and limitation in full movement of the joint are typical. The stiffness tends to be worse first thing in the morning but tends to loosen up after half an hour or so.
- Swelling and inflammation of an affected joint can sometimes occur.
- An affected joint tends to look a little larger than normal. This is due to overgrowth of the bone next to damaged cartilage.
- If you have bad OA that affects your shoulder, you may have difficulty in putting your clothes on, and using the arm above shoulder height
- Pain at night may be an increasing problem with advancing OA

Do I need any tests?

Your doctor can often diagnose osteoarthritis based on your age, your typical symptoms and examination of your affected joints. Tests such as X-rays or blood tests are usually not needed. However, sometimes your doctor may suggest X-rays or other tests if they are uncertain about the diagnosis and want to exclude other problems, and also to decide what the best management is.

What is the outlook for people with osteoarthritis?

The severity of symptoms can vary. In many people, OA is mild and does not make you any more disabled than expected for your age. However, in some people, the severity of OA and the disability it causes is out of proportion to your age.

What are the aims of physiotherapy?

The aim of physiotherapy is to increase joint mobility, improve muscle strength and try and relieve pain.

General measures to help treat osteoarthritis:

➤ Exercise

- If possible, exercise regularly. This helps to strengthen the muscles around affected joints, to keep you fit, and to maintain a good range joint movement.

➤ Other therapies

- Some people find that they can also get some pain relief from using hot or cold packs.
- Some people have found that Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulator (TENS) machines help to ease pain from OA. A TENS machine delivers small electrical pulses to the body via electrodes placed on the skin.

Shoulder Exercises – Page 1

- The aim of these exercises is to help you regain normal movement
- Start with x 5 of each – gradually increase by 1 or 2 each day
Try to exercise at least x three times a day



Stop these exercises if you feel they are:

- Making your symptoms worse
- Bringing on new pain



Stand leaning with your good arm supporting.

Let your other arm hang relaxed, straight down. Swing your arm:

1. Forwards and Backwards
2. Across your chest, left to right
3. Swing your arm as though drawing a circle

Repeat ___ times, as pain allows



Sit or stand. Place your hands on a table with a towel underneath.

Slide your hands along the table as far as you can, without lifting your shoulders.

Repeat ___ times, as pain allows.



Place your forearm on a table on a towel, keep your shoulder back.

Slide your forearm out to the side.

Repeat ___ times, as pain allows.



Stand with arms behind your back and hold one hand.

Slide your hand up along your back.

Repeat ___ times, as pain allows.

Integrated Musculoskeletal Service

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