



Working together to achieve the healthiest life possible for everyone in Ayrshire and Arran

Section 1: Exercises for painful and weak shoulders

It is important to remember there is no magic recipe for exercises however strengthening exercises are particularly important, and have been shown to improve movement, reduce pain and build strength compared to stretching or range of motion exercises.

These exercises have been separated into 3 levels of difficulty. How sore you are will determine what exercise you will feel comfortable starting with.

TIP Remember though, it may be better to start with easier exercises then progress, than it is to deal with a flare up in your pain if you overdo things..

There is no clear agreement on how often exercises should be performed but higher reps and at least 3 sets are recommended, however these do not need to be performed every day. 4 times a week would be the minimum you should aim to perform.

Remember it is normal to have some pain and discomfort when exercising which should improve the more you practise. However if your pain worsens and does not ease by reducing your exercises or having more recovery time between sessions please contact your GP or physiotherapist.

TIP You wouldn't run a full marathon straight away after an injury so don't try to do too much too soon.

Aim to start with a lower number of repetitions of exercises, and check how you feel afterwards as per the pain guide on page 16, then gradually build up to the number of exercises recommended below.

Level 1

Early painful stage

Isometric exercises are a type of strength training that causes a gentle static contraction of the muscle. These can be very helpful for pain relief.

Ideally stand for these exercises, but they can be done in sitting if you struggle to stand.

1 - External rotation

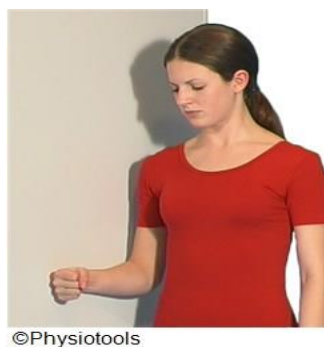
Stand with your upper arm close to your side, elbow at a right angle and the back of your hand against a wall. Push the back of your hand against the wall. Hold approx. for 10 seconds. Repeat times 5-6 times. 3-4 x daily.

You can progress the exercise by holding the muscle contraction for longer (up to 45 seconds)



2 - Abduction (lifting your elbow away from your side)

Stand sideways against a wall with your upper arm close to your side and elbow at a right angle. Push the forearm to the side against the wall. Hold for 10secs. Repeat 5-6 times, 3-4 x daily. You can progress the exercise by holding the muscle contraction for longer (up to 45secs)



3 - Shoulder flexion in lying with or without assistance

People with painful and weak shoulders often find it difficult to raise their arms above their head, so lying down can often be a useful starting point for rehabilitation as the muscles have less work to do in lying.

Lie on your back & slowly lift your affected arm up as far as you can above your head. If you struggle you could use your other hand to assist the movement. Aim to repeat 10-15 times, 3 sets, daily.



Option

If this becomes easy, you can do this in standing, or alternatively try the “scaption” exercise in Level 3 with no weight and within your comfort.

4 - Low Rows

Sit up straight and lift arms forwards, with your elbows straight. Pull your elbows backwards and shoulder blades together. Straighten your arms back to starting position. Repeat 8-15 times, 3 sets.

Tip This can easily be progressed by using an exercise band or weights if this feels too easy



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Painful and Weak shoulders: Level 2

When the exercises in level 1 become too easy or if you do not find them helpful then add in or swap to level 2 exercises.

You can add in exercises 1 or 2 at a time and either progress or stop exercises that have become too easy

Wall slide

Stand facing a wall & place the edges your hands on the wall with your thumbs facing you. A cloth or socks over your hands may assist your hands to slide on the wall. Now step forward as you gently push into the wall and slide your arms up as far as you can. Then relax and return to starting position Repeat 8-15 times, 3 sets.



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Option to progress

Make this harder by using a resistance band around your hands. Stretch your hands apart to start with keeping your elbows narrower than with your hands.

Again, step forwards as you raise your hands upwards.



External rotation strengthening

Side lying with your hips and knees bent. A thin towel is placed under your top arm and your elbow bent to 90 degrees. Keep your upper arm pressed to your side by squeezing the towel gently, and raise your hand up towards the ceiling. Return to the starting position in a controlled manner. Aim to repeat 8-15 times, working towards 3 sets.

Tip *Once this starts to feel easy you can progress the exercise by using a weight, this in turn might mean you have to reduce your reps as your body adjusts but this should improve with time.*



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Wall Press Up

Stand facing a wall with your arms straight and hands on the wall. Do push-ups against the wall keeping your body in a straight line. Repeat times 8-15, 3 sets. The exercise can be made more difficult by moving your feet further away from the wall, and lowering your hands so that your hands always stay level with your shoulders. *Other progressions could be performing the exercise on a work top or table or you could try to clap between press ups.*



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Chair press

To do this exercise sit in a chair with your palms placed down on the seat. Straighten your elbows and lift your bottom slightly off the chair. Squeeze your shoulder blades together (these are situated at the back of shoulder). Keep your shoulder relaxed whilst doing this exercise. Hold for 5 seconds and then slowly return your bottom back on to your seat. Repeat 8-15, 3 sets.



Painful and Weak shoulders: Level 3

Level 3 exercises should be performed if you have found the exercises in level 1 & 2 too easy or not helpful. These exercises are generally for patients who have good movement of the shoulder but have ongoing pain and weakness.

Scaption

Stand tall with arms by your sides, holding small weights (tin can/water bottle). Lift your arms out in front of you, with thumbs pointing upwards. Lift up to 90 degrees. Hold for 5 secs. Lower your arms to the starting position in a controlled manner. Don't sway your back and try not to shrug your shoulders. Repeat times 8-15 times, 3 sets. Progress this by taking your arms higher.



Bent over row

Stand holding small weights then tilt forward from your hips, keeping spine and neck in a neutral position. Pull your elbows back and squeeze your shoulder blades in and down. Lower the arms down in a controlled manner. Repeat 8-15 times, 3 sets



Shoulder press

Stand tall. Hold small weights at shoulder height, elbows pointing forward. Press weights up by straightening your elbows. Return back to the starting position. Avoid shrugging your shoulder or arching your lower back. If you struggle standing, do this in a seated position. Repeat 8-15 times, 3 sets.

TIP This exercise can be progressed by adding starting in a squat position and straighten your knees as you as you push your arms up. By exercising your legs at the same time you can make this exercise more effective.



Rotation Strengthening

If you are still getting pain when you take your hand above your head or if you play a racquet sport, you still need to strengthen your muscles in this position.

Sit tall with your shoulder and elbow at 90° and your arm supported on a table. Slowly externally rotate the arm backwards as far as you comfortably can and slowly return. Then slowly let your arm rotate back down. Repeat 8-15 times, 3 sets. Once you can do this comfortably you can take the support of the table away or the exercise could be performed in standing.



Ready to progress?

Make this harder by doing this in standing, and then adding a weight or resistance band.

Press ups

On your hands and knees, hands slightly wider than shoulders, and keeping your body in a straight line (do not let your bottom stick up or let your back arch too much), slowly lower your chest towards the floor, then push back up. Repeat between 8-15 times, for 3 sets. This exercise can be progressed by moving to a full press up.

Tip *As you come up make sure you are drawing your shoulders away from your ears*



Shoulder taps

Start on your hands and toes, with your body in a straight line. Push your chest slightly away from the floor and hold the position. Shift the weight onto one arm and tap the supporting arm with the other hand. Try to keep the position of your upper back (push strongly with the supportive arm towards the floor) and keep pelvis as level as possible. Bring the weight back to two arms and repeat with the other side. Repeat 8-15 times, 3 sets. This exercise could be made easier by placing your knees on the floor or standing up leaning on a table or a wall.

