

# Caring for your... Shoulder Joint Injury

THIS LEAFLET is for people with a recent shoulder joint injury and gives a brief outline of the most common shoulder problems. The shoulder is the most mobile joint in the body. It is therefore unstable and prone to injury from sporting activities, falls and other accidents. Injuries are often due to either a stretch or tear of one or more tissues (ligaments, tendons or muscles) in the shoulder.

Your health professional will assess the type and severity of your injury, discuss this with you and advise you on how long it may take to get better. You may need to change some of your usual activities while your shoulder heals.

## Common Shoulder Problems

**Rotator Cuff Disorders** (includes tendinosis/tears) are common in people over 35 years of age. Your health professional may advise:

- a supervised exercise programme to help recovery
- when you need to return to see them.

**Dislocations** happen with traumatic injury. Referral to a specialist is usually recommended. Your health professional will advise you:

- if you need a sling
- when you need to return to see them.

With these injuries a supervised rehabilitation programme is often needed and a return to sport should be avoided for at least 6 weeks.



**AC Joint Disorders** are common in people playing contact sports and after falls on the shoulder. Your health professional will advise you:

- if you need a sling in the first week
- of some exercises (when your pain settles) to help recovery
- about returning to see them in 2-3 weeks to check your recovery.

Heavy lifting and contact sports should be avoided for 8-12 weeks.

*Return to see your health professional if:*

- *pain and/or swelling gets worse*
- *there is no improvement after 2-3 days*
- *you have any worries*

**Pain control** Ice can help reduce pain and any swelling. Place ice wrapped in a damp towel on your injured shoulder – don't put ice directly on the skin as it can cause an ice burn. Apply the ice for up to 20 minutes every 2 hours during the first few days after the injury, or as advised by your health professional.

Try putting a pillow under your injured shoulder to help you sleep and stop you rolling onto the shoulder. Paracetamol can help with pain. Avoid taking aspirin as this can increase any bleeding and bruising in or around the joint. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice on the pain medication best for you.

**Return to activity** Unless your health professional advises you otherwise, try to use your shoulder in your everyday activities. Your health professional will advise when you can lift heavy objects again and/or take part in contact sports. If you are unsure what activities are safe, always ask for advice.

To help you regain mobility and strength in your shoulder, specific home exercises and/or a supervised rehabilitation programme may be advised. Ask your health professional what exercises are appropriate for you, when and how often to do them.

Try the following exercise. If pain (or swelling) gets worse, stop the exercise and see your health professional.

Stand with your toes touching the wall and walk your fingers up the corner of the wall as high as you can as shown in the picture. Make sure that your shoulder stays relaxed while you do this.



## Tips to prevent another injury

- Stay fit
- Always warm-up, cool-down and stretch before and after physical activity
- Keep doing the exercises recommended by your health professional
- Prepare for sport with pre-season fitness training
- Ensure you are completely rehabilitated before you return to sport or activities
- Avoid breaking a fall with an outstretched arm
- At work and home avoid over extending the shoulder especially when lifting weights.

Further information on shoulder injuries and correct sports techniques is available online at [www.acc.co.nz/injury-prevention](http://www.acc.co.nz/injury-prevention) or can be ordered from ACC on 0800 802444.

## Personal instructions

I would like to see you again in/on:

Exercise / rehabilitation instructions:

## Important phone numbers