

Relief for a Frozen Shoulder Diagnosis

Also known as adhesive capsulitis, frozen shoulder occurs when the capsule, or the membrane, around the shoulder joint becomes inflamed and contracted. A frozen shoulder diagnosis may feel frustrating because the exact cause of this condition is unknown and it often develops for no apparent reason at all. Frozen shoulder is, however, particularly common in women, diabetics and people aged between 40 and 60.

The condition has four distinct stages: pain elevation, freezing, frozen, and thawing. Each stage is characterized by a specific trait..

In the first stage, pain increases gradually, worsening at night. This stage typically lasts a few weeks to a few months, during which you won't notice any changes to your range of motion.

In the second 'freezing' stage, movement in your shoulder becomes increasingly restricted in all directions. Meanwhile, pain continues to worsen. This will continue over the course of 3 to 6 months.

In the third stage, your pain improves but the shoulder remains stiff and tender. This is referred to as the 'frozen' stage, which will also last between 3 and 6 months.

In the fourth and final 'thawing' stage, your shoulder regains movement and pain is significantly reduced. At this point, you are able to return to normal activities. The stiffness may persist for up to 9 months before you proceed to a full recovery.

A PhysioFirst physiotherapist can diagnose a frozen shoulder during your initial assessment with us, so you won't have to wait and wonder any longer. In the meantime, we can recommend some stretches to help provide some relief from the pain and stiffness.

Stretches to Relieve a Frozen Shoulder

The following stretches will provide you with some relief for your frozen shoulder and promote a more timely recovery. Remember to always warm up your shoulder for ten to fifteen minutes before attempting to stretch. We recommend taking a warm shower or bath, but a heating pad or hot towel can be used where this is not an option. While you should push yourself to the point of tension, do not push yourself to the point of pain during any of these stretches.

#1 - Pendulum Stretch

Stand and lean forward slightly with your shoulders relaxed. Swing the arm of the afflicted shoulder in a circular motion (about a foot in diameter) ten times in each

direction. Increase the diameter as your symptoms improve, eventually progressing to the use of a light weight (three to five pounds) held by the swinging arm. The pendulum stretch should be performed once a day.

#2 - Towel Stretch

Holding one end of a hand towel behind your back, grab the opposite end with the hand on the frozen side. Hold the towel in a horizontal position, then use your strong arm to pull the frozen arm gently upward.

In another, more advanced version of this exercise, drape the towel over your good shoulder. Hold the front end of the towel with your frozen side and use your strong side to pull the back end of the towel toward your lower back.

Perform your chosen version of this exercise 10 to 20 times per day.

#3 - Finger Walk

Facing a wall three quarters of an arm's length away, reach out and touch the surface at waist level with the fingertips on your frozen side. With a slightly bent elbow, walk your fingers up the wall as high as you can comfortably go. You should be using the muscles in your fingers to lift and not the muscles in your shoulder. When finished, lower the arm slowly and repeat 10 to 20 times a day.

#4 - Cross-Body Reach

In a seated or standing position, use your strong arm to lift the arm on your frozen side at the elbow. Bring it up and lay it across your body, exerting gentle pressure. Hold this stretch for 15 to 20 seconds and repeat 10 to 20 times per day.

#5 Armpit Stretch

With your good arm, lift the affected arm onto a shelf about breast height. Gently bend your knees to open up the armpit. Deepen your knee bend slightly and then straighten. Each knee bend should stretch a little further without forcing the shoulder or armpit to the point of pain. Do this 10 to 20 times each day.

#6 - Outward Rotation

With a rubber exercise band between your hands and your elbows tucked in at your sides at a 90-degree angle, rotate the lower part of your affected arm outward two or three inches. Hold for five seconds and repeat 10 to 15 times, once a day.

#7 - Inward Rotation

Standing next to a closed door, hook one end of a rubber exercise band around the doorknob. With your elbow at a 90-degree angle, hold the other end with the hand of

the affected arm. Pull the band toward your body, holding two or three inches away for five seconds. Repeat 10 to 15 times, once a day.

Physiotherapy for Frozen Shoulder

In addition to asking you to follow a specialized stretching regimen and tailored exercise program designed for you by your physiotherapist, we may also recommend further therapies. Both soft tissue massage and shockwave therapy have proven beneficial for treating cases of frozen shoulder in our patients.

Soft tissue massage reduces the tension that often develops as a result of the restricting muscles. This can help restore some range of motion and provide temporary relief. Shockwave therapy sends shockwaves through your skin towards the afflicted areas in your shoulder to soothe muscles and release tension.

We would be happy to tell you more about the ways we can work with you to move through the stages of frozen shoulder as comfortably as possible and move on with your life. Call us today at 1-833-UR-HEARD or book an appointment online [here](#). We can't wait to hear from you!