

Edmonton Bone and Joint Centre

#2068, 9499-137 Ave NW (Northgate Centre), Edmonton, AB T5E 5R8

Phone: (780) 433-3155 Fax: (780) 432-6395



Managing Shoulder Arthritis

Pain Control

- Heat and cold can be used for short term pain relief. Try both to see which works best for you. Applying warm or cold packs on your shoulder for 15-20 minutes may help. Place a dry layer between your skin and the warm or cold pack. Check your skin every few minutes to make sure you do not burn yourself.
- Pain medication such as Tylenol Arthritis® used in combination with a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) can be effective. The anti-inflammatory can be an ointment, such as Voltaren® or Diclofenac cream, or an oral over-the-counter medication such as Ibuprofen® or Aleve®. Check with your doctor first to ensure that the pain medication is right for you if you have other medical conditions. Prescription medication may also be an option.
- Some patients have reported doing pendular exercises throughout the day and night helps reduce pain. Try to see if it works for you.



Bend at the waist so your arm is dangling down. You may want to hold onto a table or chair for support. Gently rock your body weight in a circular motion to move your arm in a circular pattern about the size of a dinner plate. Do this 10 times in both a clockwise and counter clockwise direction.

Positioning

Regardless of whether you are sitting or lying down, ensure your arm is supported in a position where your elbow/hand does not fall or rest behind the midline of your body.

- **In sitting**, use an arm rest or place a pillow under your elbow to support your arm. Make sure you are not reaching down to the arm rest or propping it too high that your shoulder is pushed up toward your ear. You may also feel more comfortable with support under your elbow while driving.
- **When lying on your back**, place a pillow or folded towel under your elbow and upper arm to keep it level or above the midline of your body. You may also find having the pillow placed under and between your arm and chest more comfortable.

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- Many people find it very uncomfortable or painful to lie on the affected/painful side.
- **When lying on your good side**, you may want to place a large pillow in front of you to “hug” and support your arm from dropping across the front of your body or place a pillow between your elbow and side.
- In extreme cases of night pain some patients have found it helpful to sleep in a more upright position such as a recliner or propped up on pillows in a slightly reclined sitting position. Make sure to support behind your elbow so your elbow doesn’t fall back behind the midline of your body.

Activity Modification

It is important to modify activities that are causing pain.

- Keep all arm and hand movement in front of your body. Do not reach behind you with your hand e.g. reaching into the back seat of your vehicle. Support your arm so your elbow and hand are always in line with or in front of your shoulder.
- Minimize prolonged positions or repetitive activities at or above shoulder height.
- Avoid heavy lifting, pushing or pulling with the affected arm.
- Keep anything of weight or load close to your body. Do not reach out beyond this distance.

Movement

A physical therapist can prescribe safe exercises to work on your posture, range of motion and strength. This may help you maintain your mobility and function. Things to keep in mind:

- **Keep good posture.** This will help your shoulder range of motion, especially when lifting your arms above shoulder height.
- Range of motion exercises can be done with pulleys, using a stick or cane or your good arm to assist moving your affected arm. **Do not push past the point where your shoulder wants to stop moving.**
- When moving your arm/shoulder, ensure you do not shrug your shoulder toward your ear. Keep your shoulder down when lifting your arm up. This will minimize neck-related issues and stress on the rotator cuff tendons.
- When working on shoulder strength your exercises should be pain-free. If they are not, a physical therapist can show you **isometric exercises** to contract and strengthen your muscles without moving your shoulder joint.
- You should **avoid weight bearing exercises** through your arms. E.g. push-ups or plank exercises
- The general rule is **IF IT HURTS DON’T DO IT.** Stop or reduce activities that make your shoulder sore.