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Frozen Shoulder

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Frozen shoulder (adhesive capsulitis) is painful and frustrating, but the good news is that **almost everyone gets better**. This sheet explains what to expect and how to help your shoulder recover.

UNDERSTANDING FROZEN SHOULDER

1 What is frozen shoulder?

The shoulder joint is surrounded by a flexible lining called the **capsule**. In frozen shoulder, the capsule becomes inflamed, then thickens and tightens. This causes pain and stiffness in **every direction**. It is not caused by a torn tendon or arthritis.

2 Why did I get it?

Often there is no clear cause. It is most common between ages **40 and 60** and in women. It is much more common in people with **diabetes** or **thyroid disease**, and it can start after a minor injury, surgery, or a period of not moving the arm.

3 What are the stages?

- **Freezing (painful) stage — about 2–9 months:** pain builds, especially at night, and motion is steadily lost.
- **Frozen (stiff) stage — about 4–12 months:** pain eases, but the shoulder stays stiff.
- **Thawing stage — about 6 months to 2 years:** motion gradually returns.

The stages overlap, and timing varies widely. The whole process commonly takes **1–3 years**.

4 How is it diagnosed?

Mostly by examination: the shoulder is stiff when you move it **and** when someone else tries to move it, especially rotating outward. An x-ray is usually taken to rule out arthritis. An MRI is usually not needed.

5 Will my shoulder go back to normal?

Most people regain enough motion for everyday activities. Some have a small amount of lasting stiffness that rarely interferes with daily life. It rarely comes back in the same shoulder, though the other shoulder is sometimes affected later.

TREATMENT

6 What treatments help?

- **Gentle home stretching** (below) and physical therapy.
- **A steroid (cortisone) injection** into the joint — the most effective option for pain, especially in the early painful stage.
- **Anti-inflammatory medication or Tylenol**, if safe for you.
- **Heat** before stretching, and ice afterward if sore.

7 Will an injection help?

Injections usually reduce pain within days to weeks and can make it easier to stretch, and they work best early. They do not cure the condition on their own, so keep up your exercises. **If you have diabetes**, expect your blood sugar to run higher for a few days afterward — check it more often.

8 Should I stretch through the pain?

No. Especially in the painful stage, forceful stretching can inflame the shoulder and make it worse. Stretch to a gentle pull or mild discomfort only. If pain lasts more than 30 minutes after stretching, ease off next time.

9 Should I stop using my arm?

No. Use it for everyday activities within comfort. Avoid sudden, jerking movements and reaching quickly — these cause sharp pain.

10 How can I sleep better?

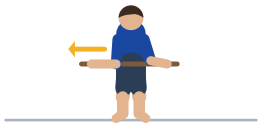
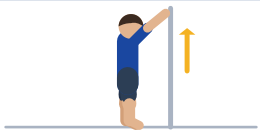
Night pain is very common in the early stage. Avoid lying on the affected side, rest the arm on a pillow, and consider taking pain medication at bedtime if approved.

11 Will I need surgery?

Rarely. If the shoulder has not improved after about **6–12 months** of good treatment, options include a manipulation under anesthesia or an arthroscopic **capsular release** to cut the tight capsule. Intensive physical therapy starts immediately after.

HOME STRETCHING PROGRAM

Take a warm shower or use heat for 10 minutes first. Move slowly; stretch to a **gentle pull, never sharp pain**. Do these every day — consistency matters more than intensity.

		EXERCISE	HOW TO DO IT	DOSE
1		**Pendulums**	Lean forward with your good hand on a table. Let the sore arm hang relaxed and gently swing it in small circles by rocking your body.	**1–2 min, 2–3×/day**
2		**Table slides**	Sit at a table with your hand on a towel. Slide your hand forward by leaning your body forward, then return.	**10 reps, 2–3×/day**
3		**Wand-assisted raise**	Lie on your back holding a stick or cane with both hands. Use your good arm to lift the sore arm overhead.	**Hold 15–30 sec, 5 reps**
4		**External rotation with stick**	Elbows at your sides and bent 90°. Use the stick to push the sore hand outward, keeping the elbow tucked in.	**Hold 15–30 sec, 5 reps**
5		**Cross-body stretch**	Bring the sore arm across your chest and gently pull it closer at the elbow with your other hand.	**Hold 15–30 sec, 5 reps**
6		**Towel stretch behind back**	Hold a towel behind your back, sore arm on the bottom. Use the top hand to gently pull the sore hand up your back.	**Hold 15–30 sec, 5 reps**
7		**Wall walk**	Face a wall and walk your fingers up as high as you comfortably can. Step closer as you improve.	**10 reps, 2–3×/day**

Still have questions? Call our office at **469.800.7200**. This sheet is general information — your doctor or therapist may adjust your program.