

Top 10 Most Burning Questions and Answers for Shoulder Pain

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The Rotator Cuff Specialists

1. Q: How long is this going to take to go away? Or how long before I see improvements?

A: It depends...it depends on YOU.

In general, it takes to 4 to 8 weeks to go through the first 2 phases of healing (no pain, all movement back to normal).

It may take another 1 to 4 months to get back to all your strength back, and another period of time to return to high level activities...depending on how active you are. These are the third and fourth phase of healing.

Here are 10 variables that determine how fast someone can heal:

- ✓ Overall health. Healthy fit people heal faster. Younger people heal faster.
- ✓ Other health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, tobacco use, alcohol abuse and body weight all influence healing rates...and make the time to heal longer.
- ✓ Diet. People who consume more nutrients in their calories (Dr. Joel Fuhrman calls this "Nutrarian") heal faster than those who primarily eat processed foods. Those who eat an anti-inflammatory diet heal more quickly.
- ✓ Rest levels. Our bodies need sleep and rest to rebuild. A lack of sleep slows healing time. 8 hours of sleep a night improves the rate of healing.
- ✓ Stress levels. People who have high levels of stress heal more slowly.
- ✓ Sedentary lifestyle. People who sit all day for work or to watch TV heal more slowly.
- ✓ People who follow advice and instruction from top level healthcare professionals heal more quickly than those who do not follow-through with care.
- ✓ People who are highly aware of their daily postures and habits heal more quickly...because they can adjust habits such as sleep or sitting positions more quickly.
- ✓ Readers heal more quickly. People with higher attention spans are more likely to be self-educated on a topic and more likely to follow-through with successful treatment.
- ✓ People who think there's hope tend to be more persistent and won't let anything stop them.

Most people we see in the clinic start to feel better in 1 to 3 visits...or within 1 to 2 weeks. Laser treatments should show improvement after the first day. If you go longer than 2 weeks without feeling better or moving better...you may be doing either too much or too little.

2. Q: Can I be completely healed or will this come back again?

A: Most people we see who complete the 4 Phases of Healing (meaning they no longer have pain, they have full mobility and strength, and they're back to doing all the activities they want to do without pain)...they have a minimal chance the pain will return.

The stronger the person is...the less likely the shoulder symptoms will come back.

Your body is a bit like a car. If you take care of it, regularly change the oil and keep it running and fine tuned...little chance of break down.

If you ignore it, or just alter the pain with medications...very likely to break down and be in need of repair. Cortisone injections are shown to actually make the shoulder worse over time.

3. Q: Do I need any special equipment?

A: At Excel PT, we use a minimalist approach...We don't use big, fancy, expensive equipment...

There are some exceptions, including laser. Otherwise, most exercises can be done with a simple ball, exercise bands and a safe place to exercise.

Our model focuses on world-class hands-on Physical Therapist, a table and some basic exercise equipment you can do at home or on the road if traveling. This works best for most people.

4. Q: Should I use heat or ice on my shoulder?

A: The cause of most shoulder pain is inflammation because the joint does not move normally! Ice may help to reduce the inflammation, and heat may make it worse.

Consider that rotator cuff impingement or tendonitis is "inflammation" on the tendon. Sometimes heat can increase that inflammation.

So if you're inflamed...do you want to put heat on it and make it more inflamed? Or ice to calm the inflammation down.

We have seen some people use ice on the shoulder to calm down the inflammation temporarily.

5. Q: Which exercises should I do?

A: The best exercises for you depend on the cause of your shoulder pain.

We will cover the 4 most common causes...

- The neck can refer pain to the shoulder, and both areas use the same muscles to control themselves. The upper thoracic spine controls the neck.
- Rotator cuff or bicep tendonitis or tears might need exercises to improve control in the shoulder itself or scapulo-thoracic joint.
- Poor posture or spinal mobility that causes shoulder pain will be addressing that cause.
- A frozen shoulder will have completely different exercises.

Each has a series of gradually more advanced exercises. So the key to picking the right exercise is to find the cause of your arthritis.

6. Q: How often should I do the exercises? And do I need to do them forever?

A: Most people we work with in the clinic for shoulder pain do the exercises at least once per day...every day. Some will do them up to 3 times per day.

Doing the same exact exercises for years without changing could be a mistake. In general, to get stronger, your exercise should progress and get more difficult as your strength improves.

WE ARE ALL AGING...SO IF WE ARE NOT GETTING STRONGER...WE ARE GETTING WEAKER!

With training your body adapts and gets stronger. Keeping that in mind, there are 2 rules to training:

1. Everything works.
2. Nothing works forever.

This means that any exercise (although difficult) MAY make you stronger. But once your body is no longer challenged, it's time to move on to something different or more challenging.

Aside from your strengthening program, people who do light aerobic exercise several days per week have less risk of reinjuring their shoulder pain.

7. Q: What do I need to do for complete care? Am I going to relapse?

A: The best thing to do for shoulder pain, if you are worried about it coming back again in the future, is to complete all 4 phases of healing.

Phase One is where you focus on getting rid of the pain, numbness and tingling.

Phase Two is where you focus on getting normal movement back.

Phase Three is where you focus on getting full strength.

Phase Four is where you go back to previous activities you want to do.

Just because the pain is gone, that doesn't mean that you are fully healed. In our clinic, when we see a person who had shoulder pain...and they are now pain free and have full motion and on their way to attaining full strength, we ask:

"What activities have you avoided in the past month that you want to get back to doing?" Some will say swimming, or golfing or tennis...something along those lines.

And we'll tell that person to take the next month or two and start to incorporate everything you want to do that you could not do before. Most times we guide them as to which activities they should incorporate first. When they have fully attained their previous strength, they should have all previous activities incorporated into their routine. They keep doing their exercises at home to get stronger and stronger.

Most come back for a recheck appointment in 2 months and have no trouble at all. At that time we can help them progress their exercises to a more challenging program if they need it.

Some do have a relapse.

We then take a look at the activity and at the program and help them get on the right track. As mentioned before, people who are stronger recover more quickly...People who make good choices in their activities heal more quickly.

So it's usually only one or two visits before that person is on the right track again.

8. Q: How do I know the cause of my pain?

A: There are 5 common causes of pain...and here are some general guidelines for each.

Many times a mild instability in the neck can cause your shoulder pain. The neck and the shoulder use the same muscles, so addressing the stability at the cervico-thoracic junction will usually reduce the shoulder pain.

Rotator cuff and bicep tendonitis often occur because the movement in the joint is altered abnormally.

Poor scapular stability and strength may be the primary cause of shoulder pain. This is sometimes caused by poor posture.

Hypomobility or frozen shoulder is not enough mobility in the shoulder. It may be a side effect of another injury that has not gone through the 4 phases of healing.

10. Q: What about rotator cuff repairs? Won't that solve my problems?

Rotator cuff decompression and repair surgeries are one of the most difficult surgeries to recover from. They may be an option that help you recover, however they should be a last resort. Remember that if you have a stiff, loose, or weak joint before the surgery, you will definitely have one after, and you will still need the therapy. There is no way to definitively tell, but the therapy may be what actually reduces your pain...not the surgery itself. We see many people whom we believe to have unnecessary shoulder surgery. Many people come out of surgery expecting to be pain free, but their pain is usually worse.

Also, if you are weak, many times a shoulder surgery can make that weakness worse, and this can lead to problems in other parts of the body.

Many rotator cuff surgeries fail. If the surgery fails, the only choice is to have another surgery, or come to therapy.

So we say, it is best to try the most conservative approach first. You will not be made worse in physical therapy. If surgery is necessary, be prepared for a long and arduous rehabilitation.