

FROZEN SHOULDER INFORMATION

Frozen shoulder is also known as adhesive capsulitis. It is most common in middle age, and in women more than men.

What is wrong with your shoulder?

We don't know the exact cause of frozen shoulder, but it can come on after minor trauma, where the shoulder is wrenched or pulled. Sometimes it can occur after surgery or after a significant trauma like a fracture or dislocation. Most commonly however we don't ever find out what brought it on.

The condition is characterised by inflammation and scar tissue forming in and around the shoulder. This is unusual and an atypical response to a small trauma. It results in pain from the inflammation and stiffness from the scar tissue.

Symptoms

The typical symptoms of frozen shoulder include quite marked pain particularly with jerking the shoulder and sudden movements. The pain can be around the whole shoulder and can go into the arm and into the hand. It can feel like a fullness or swelling, sometimes a numbness or burning. The pain followed by quite marked stiffness and the shoulder cannot be lifted above head height, or rotated outwards or inwards towards the buttock.

Resolution

Frozen shoulder gets better by itself over 12 to 18 months. However it is more severe and continues longer if there is coexistent diabetes or thyroid disease. Sometimes I ask patients to have blood tests to exclude these additional problems.

There is no single cure for frozen shoulder. There is no magic tablet or medicine. The condition will just get better by itself, in time: mostly 12-18 months. Some of these treatments help with the pain and even shorten the recovery.

Treatment

Pain: we can help the pain with regular Panadol, two tablets four times daily, regular use of hot packs and hot showers, anti-inflammatories, and a steroid injection in and around the shoulder. Injection might be repeated up to 3 times.

Stiffness: a twice daily stretching program including breaststroke swimming in a pool or spa will gradually improve shoulder movement.

Other treatments: there are all sorts of other treatments, including massage and acupuncture, as well as many others, all of which may take the edge off the pain. I'm quite happy for you to explore these alternative treatments, as they are unlikely to do any harm, and are sometimes **quite helpful** in reducing the discomfort.

Surgery

Generally surgery has a very small role to play in frozen shoulder; there is nothing to repair.

Occasionally however some people have terrible stiffness, cannot get their arm away from the body

or to their bottom, and they need release surgery to get them started with the stretching exercises. This can be done any time after 4-6 months after the diagnosis is made.

Activities

Frozen shoulder is one of the few conditions where **it is better to use the arm than to rest it**. Using the shoulder even for quite heavy lifting or repeated movements will not do any harm, and in fact using the shoulder is generally good for it, but will cause some discomfort.

If you have any questions please give me a call at my office at any time, I would happy to hear form you.

GREGGORY BURROW