



**British Elbow & Shoulder Society**  
Rehabilitation exercises for primary care patients

Exercises to treat your  
**SUBACROMIAL SHOULDER PAIN**

**REHABILITATION EXERCISE BOOKLET**

A resource for GPs and their patients

# YOUR SHOULDER PROBLEM

## Why have you been given this booklet?

Your GP has diagnosed you with a **common shoulder problem** which causes a type of shoulder pain called subacromial shoulder pain.

Research has demonstrated that if people suffering with this common problem do the **right type of rehabilitation exercises** then they can successfully treat themselves.

If you follow the instructions and exercises on the following pages and the videos on the website, there is an excellent chance you will improve your shoulder pain and not need any more treatments or referral to the hospital.

## What is subacromial pain?

Subacromial pain is very common and causes pain in the shoulder and upper arm. It can spread further down the arm and up towards the neck and shoulder blade. It can feel worse when the arm is moved away from the body such as reaching up or when placing the hand behind the back.

Pain can come on slowly over time or quite quickly if the shoulder has been used for an activity that is much more demanding than it is used to doing each day.

## YOUR SHOULDER EXERCISES

### **What is the exercise treatment?**

Your shoulder should start to feel better within 6 to 12 weeks if you do the simple exercises on the following pages. These have been recommended by the UK's leading shoulder physiotherapists and proven to reduce pain and improve your shoulder. This booklet will show you how to do them within the comfort of your home. You can also watch videos of how to do these daily exercises on the following website. ([www.bess.org.uk](http://www.bess.org.uk)).

You may only be able to move your arm a small amount at the start but this will improve over time. A small increase in pain while exercising is ok as long as it goes away within 30 minutes and is not worse the next day. If this happens, don't worry, do less repetitions the next time and then gradually build up again.

It may take 6 weeks before you start to see improvement.

If your shoulder does not improve over 6-12 weeks, or gets worse despite the exercises, you will need to visit your doctor again.

## YOUR SHOULDER EXERCISES

**The key to success and getting the most from your exercises are:**

- Build the exercises into your daily routine so you can do them regularly.
- Find time when you are not under pressure and can give the exercises your full attention.
- Try to do the exercises on six days each week with one day off. If you want to get better, you will need to do them on at least four days of the week.
- You don't have to do all three exercises straight away – you can start with two and build in the third when you get confident.
- It helps to keep an exercise diary to record how many repetitions you have done and see how you are progressing.
- If one particular movement causes more pain, then use it each week to test if you are improving and getting better.

## EXERCISE ONE: WALL SLIDES

Find a smooth wall or wall mirror and a cloth that will slide easily on the wall (or put clean socks on your hands). Stand facing the wall. Place the edges of your hands against the wall with your thumbs facing you.

Now step forward as you gently push into the wall and slide your hands up as far as you can. Relax and return to start position.



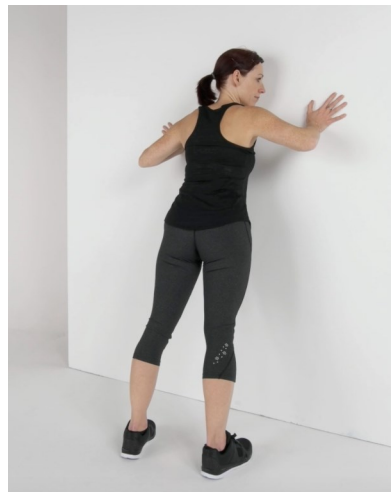
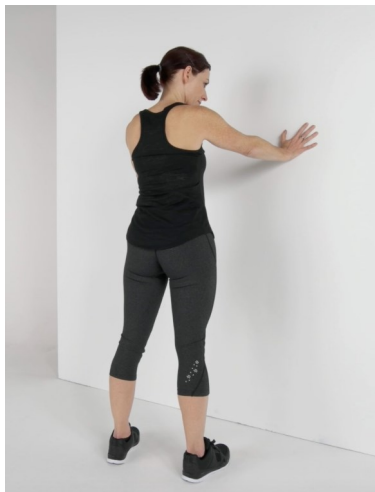
- **Repeat 8 times**
- **Rest for a minute**
- **Repeat 8 times**
- **Rest for a minute**
- **Repeat 8 times**

When you can do this exercise easily you can progress by doing it without the support of the wall and adding a light weight.

## EXERCISE TWO: PUSH-UPS AGAINST THE WALL

Now put your hands on the wall as if you are going to do a pushup. Make sure your hands are placed a little wider than the width of your shoulders, your hands are turned out slightly and your elbows are below your shoulders.

Now lower your body towards the wall keeping your body nice and tall.



- **Repeat 8 times**
- **Rest for a minute**
- **Repeat 8 times**
- **Rest for a minute**
- **Repeat 8 times**

When you can do this exercise easily you can progress and increase load by moving your feet further from the wall.

## EXERCISE THREE: SHOULDER ROTATION EXERCISES

Sit next to a table with your elbow supported just below shoulder height on a rolled up towel.

Now make a gentle fist, keep your elbow bent and then rotate your forearm to point upwards.

Return to the start position and relax.

Make sure you sit up tall whilst you do this.

When it is easy for you to do this you can add a light weight – start with half kilo or a small 500ml water bottle.

As the exercise gets easier you can increase the weight:

- First to 1 kilo
- Then to 1 and a half kilos
- Then to 2 kilos.



## OTHER TOP TIPS

- ✓ Be patient! It may be 6 -12 weeks before you see a big change in your pain so you need to stick with it.
- ✓ Don't stop moving your shoulder – muscles need movement to keep them healthy.
- ✓ If your sleep is poor, try supporting your arm on a pillow and roll a pillow up behind your back to stop you rolling on to your painful shoulder.
- ✓ Step towards things rather than stretch for them to make movement easier for your shoulder.
- ✓ General exercise can really help your recovery so try to keep going with other activities you enjoy to keep fit.
- ✓ If you don't exercise regularly try and build something in – even a brisk 20 minute walk 3 times a week will help.
- ✓ See [bess.org.uk/index.php/patients/patient-information-leaflets/subacromial-rehabilitation](http://bess.org.uk/index.php/patients/patient-information-leaflets/subacromial-rehabilitation) for accompanying exercise videos.



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