

Frozen Shoulder Syndrome

Frozen shoulder, also known as adhesive capsulitis, may cause a severe limitation of shoulder motion. The network of ligaments that surround the shoulder joint (called the joint capsule) tighten causing the characteristic pain and stiffness.

The exact cause of frozen shoulder is unknown. It may occur following a shoulder injury, immobilization, or for no apparent reason at all. Some have theorized that frozen shoulder may be an "autoimmune disease," a condition resulting when the immune system begins attacking the healthy parts of your body. The disorder affects women more frequently than men, and has a higher incidence among diabetics and in the 40-65 age group.

Frozen shoulder has been described to take place in 3 stages, which can span in excess of 1-2 years. The initial stage—the "freezing" stage—is marked by significant shoulder pain and progressively decreasing range of motion. Pain diminishes somewhat in the "frozen" stage however the extreme stiffness persists. The range of motion very gradually returns and pain relents during the "thawing" stage.

Treatments for frozen shoulder generally involve moving and stretching the shoulder in an effort to regain lost mobility and minimizing pain. This may not completely alleviate the symptoms of frozen shoulder. However, it may help restore enough flexibility to allow for everyday activities. Anti-inflammatory medications, corticosteroid injections, and physical therapy treatment may also help minimize symptoms and/or speed recovery.

Rarely, surgery is an option to remove scar tissue and adhesions from inside your shoulder joint. Surgery, however, is often seen as a last resort since immobilization is often necessary to reduce pain post-operatively. Further immobilization can sometimes be counterproductive. A shoulder manipulation under general anesthesia is another more aggressive approach to try to loosen the shoulder joint.

Unfortunately, frozen shoulder is a very painful and debilitating condition.

Treatment, while often effective in reducing some of the symptoms, often does not prevent the disease from "running its course."

The above is intended as general information only. Be sure to contact your physician for advice on your own specific medical problems.