

Adhesive Capsulitis



Exploring the what, why and how with STRIVE Sport & Exercise Medicine



What is Adhesive Capsulitis?

Adhesive capsulitis is often referred to as “frozen shoulder”. As the name implies, this is a condition where the capsule around the shoulder becomes so stiff that it restricts shoulder movement and causes pain. This condition progresses over three stages: the painful, frozen and thawing stage. The painful stage can last between 3 – 9 months and patients will experience increased pain, difficulty sleeping, and reduction in shoulder range of motion. The frozen stage can last between 4 – 9 months and the main symptom experienced is stiffness. Some pain can persist. The last stage is the thawing stage which can last between 5 – 26 months and patients can expect further reduction in pain and a gradual improvement in range of motion.



Why did I get this?

Some people have one or more risk factors that may lead to frozen shoulder, while others develop frozen shoulder with no clear cause. There are several reasons that can increase the risk of developing frozen shoulder. One is experiencing a traumatic event like an injury to the shoulder, shoulder surgery or a stroke. Previous injuries to the rotator cuff muscles or bicep muscle, as well shoulder osteoarthritis can also contribute to developing frozen shoulder. Adhesive capsulitis is more common in females, diabetic individuals and those with thyroid conditions.



How can I get better?

Exercise can be an important component to help manage your pain and help with your range of motion. It is important to understand that there is no “quick fix” for adhesive capsulitis. The timelines listed above are averages and your experience with adhesive capsulitis may align with those timelines, or may be shorter or longer. At times it may be frustrating and discouraging that your shoulder is taking a long time to recover. You can speak with your physician or therapist for additional treatments that may help manage your symptoms as your shoulder recovers.

4 Exercises for you

Exercise: Assisted Shoulder Raise
Goal: Mobility



1. Stand and hold a stick with both of your hands keeping your arms at your sides.
2. Pull your shoulder blades down and back. Raise your arm to the side by using the unaffected arm to swing the stick upwards and sideways away from your body.
3. Hold for 10-15 seconds at the top.
4. Slowly return to the starting position and repeat.

Parameters: 3 sets of 10 repetitions. Perform once per day, every day.

Exercise: Dumbbell Pendulum
Goal: Mobility



1. Place one hand on a support (table or countertop) with your trunk bent forward, and the involved arm hanging and holding a light dumbbell in your hand.
 2. Using your body to assist the movement, draw circles with your arm in one direction and then the other.
- Parameters:** Perform for 30 seconds, take a break, and then repeat 3 times. Perform once per day, every day.

Exercise: Rows
Goal: Strength



1. Stand and tie an elastic to a stationary object in front of you at waist level. Hold each end of the elastic band with your hands.
 2. With your shoulders down and back, pull your arms back by bending the elbows and squeezing your shoulder blades together.
 3. Imagine that there is a pen between your shoulder blades and you have to squeeze it.
 4. Slowly return to the initial position and repeat.
- Parameters:** 3 sets of 10 repetitions. Perform once per day, every day.