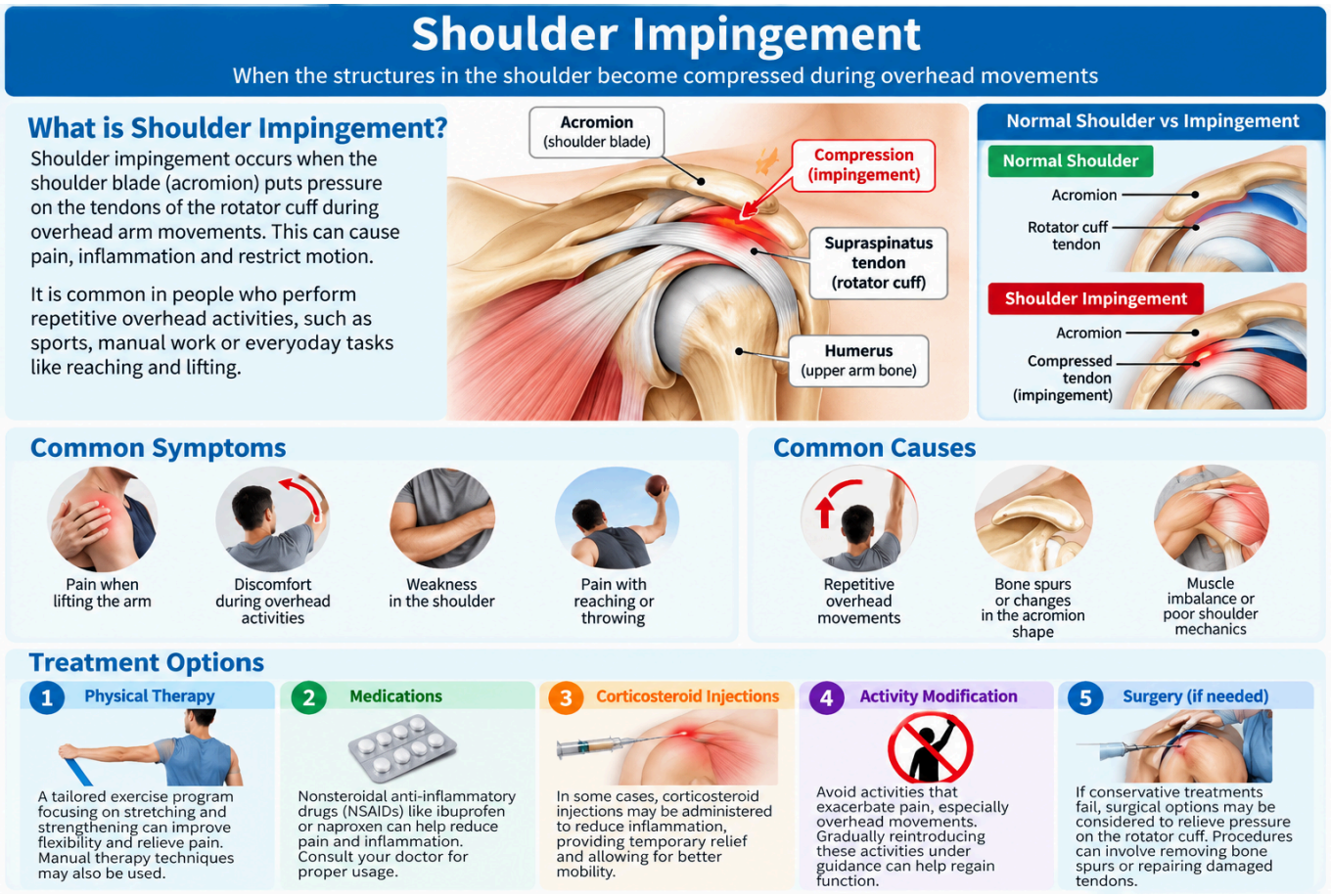
Shoulder Impingement

Understanding shoulder pain, symptoms and treatment



Understanding shoulder impingement

Shoulder impingement can cause pain during lifting and reaching. Treatment often starts with guided exercise, activity changes and appropriate pain relief.

IMPORTANT

Seek professional advice if symptoms persist or interfere with daily activities.

Causes and treatment options

Ways to relieve pain and restore shoulder function

Treatment approaches

1. Physical therapy

A tailored stretching and strengthening programme can improve flexibility and relieve pain. Your therapist may also use manual therapy to help movement.

2. Medications

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen or naproxen, may reduce pain and inflammation. Consult your doctor about suitable use.

3. Corticosteroid injections

In some cases, an injection may be considered to reduce inflammation temporarily and improve mobility.

4. Activity modification

Reduce activities that aggravate pain, especially repeated overhead movements. Gradually reintroduce them with professional guidance.

5. Surgery

If conservative treatments are unsuccessful, surgery may be considered to relieve pressure on the rotator cuff, remove bone spurs or repair damaged tendons.

Exercises and rehabilitation

Movement and strengthening under professional guidance

Shoulder exercise examples

The exercises below are examples. Ask your physiotherapist which movements are appropriate and how to progress them.

Shoulder Impingement Exercises

Gentle exercises to improve shoulder mobility, strength and function

These exercises can help improve flexibility, reduce pain and strengthen the muscles around the shoulder. Perform them slowly and within a comfortable range.

Important
- Perform exercises only if advised by your physiotherapist
- Stop if pain increases
- Progress gradually

1 Pendulum Exercise



30 seconds each side

- Lean forward and support yourself on a table.
- Let your affected arm hang down relaxed.
- Gently swing the arm in small circles or forwards and backwards.

2 Assisted Shoulder Flexion



10 repetitions, 2–3 sets

- Hold a stick or pole with both hands.
- Use your unaffected arm to help lift the affected arm forwards.
- Raise to a comfortable height, then lower slowly.

3 Assisted Shoulder Abduction



10 repetitions, 2–3 sets

- Hold a stick with both hands.
- Use your unaffected arm to help move the affected arm out to the side.
- Raise to a comfortable height, then lower slowly.

4 External Rotation (with band)



10 repetitions, 2–3 sets

- Attach a resistance band at elbow height.
- Keep your elbow close to your side.
- Gently rotate your arm outwards.
- Return slowly to the start position.

5 Horizontal Abduction



10 repetitions, 2–3 sets

- Hold a resistance band with both hands in front of you at shoulder height.
- Keep your arms straight or slightly bent.
- Slowly pull the band apart, moving your arms out to the sides.
- Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then return slowly.

6 Scaption (diagonal raise)



10 repetitions, 2–3 sets

- Hold a light weight (e.g. 0.5–1 kg).
- Raise your arm diagonally (about 30–45° in front of your body) to shoulder height.
- Lower slowly.

7 Side-lying External Rotation



10 repetitions, 2–3 sets

- Lie on your unaffected side with your affected arm on top.
- Keep your elbow at 90° and by your side.
- Rotate your forearm up, then lower slowly.

8 Push-up with a plus (serratus anterior strengthening)



10 repetitions, 2–3 sets

- Start in a press-up position (knees or toes).
- Keeping your arms straight, gently push your shoulder blades forward (protract).
- Return to the start position.

Exercise tips
- Perform exercises slowly and with good control.
- Work within a comfortable range – mild discomfort is acceptable, but stop if pain increases.
- Build up gradually as your shoulder improves.
- Aim for 2–3 sets of 10 repetitions, as advised by your physiotherapist.
- Combine exercises with good posture and regular movement.

When to stop and seek advice
- Stop if you experience increasing pain, sharp pain or significant weakness.
- Seek advice from your physiotherapist or healthcare professional if symptoms worsen or do not improve.
- These exercises may not be suitable for everyone – always get individual guidance.

Exercise safely

- Begin only with exercises recommended for your shoulder.
- Do not push through pain; stop if symptoms worsen.
- Progress gradually and seek advice about technique.

Precautions and next steps

Supporting a comfortable return to daily activities

What to avoid during recovery

Overhead activities

Limit lifting or repeated overhead movements if they aggravate symptoms, until strength and flexibility improve.

Pushing through pain

Listen to your body. Stop or modify activities that cause discomfort rather than forcing movement.

High-impact sport and heavy lifting

Avoid sudden, strenuous movements that worsen symptoms during recovery.

Starting a new exercise programme without advice

Consult a healthcare professional first, particularly if you have existing conditions or previous shoulder injuries.

Key message

With suitable treatment and precautions, many people find relief and regain shoulder function. Seek a personalised assessment if you have symptoms.

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