

# THE CENTER for CLINICAL MASSAGE

Ken Laymon

## Shoulder pain

### Frozen shoulder and other conditions

You feel it most when you reach into your hip pocket. Combing your hair causes pain. In sleep, you roll over and then you are awakened by the discomfort. What is often called frozen shoulder is characterized by pain and stiffness in the shoulder that turns everyday tasks into pain-filled challenges. It limits your range of motion and affects your quality of life.

#### *The shoulder joint*

The top of the upper arm bone, shoulder blade, collarbone, and various muscles and ligaments come together at the shoulder joint. The remarkable teamwork of these parts allows the shoulder to move in more ways than any other joint.

Imagine how inconvenient simple tasks would be without the use of this joint, or how limiting it would be if our arms only moved in one direction like an old-fashioned Barbie Doll's. Aside from the hip, the shoulder is the only other "ball-and-socket" joint that can freely move in many directions. The down side is that its wide range of mobility makes it more susceptible to injury.

#### *Causes of shoulder pain*

Pain and limitation in the shoulder can be caused by muscle tension, repetitive strain injury, dislocation, osteo- or rheumatoid arthritis, tendinitis, bursitis, pulmonary or cardiac disorders, myofascial trigger points, surgery or poor posture.

"Frozen shoulder" is often used to refer to various soft tissue problems in the area. True frozen shoulder is called adhesive capsulitis because the muscles and ligaments at the shoulder joint adhere to each other, becoming thickened and contracted. Symptoms include intense pain and restricted movement. If you are experiencing severe or persistent pain in your shoulder, consult your primary health practitioner before receiving massage.



*You can return to pain-free shoulder movement with a program of exercises and massage therapy.*

#### *Massage can help*

The good news is that massage therapy can help reduce pain and restore mobility in your shoulder. Through the use of preventive maintenance, self-care exercises and frequent massage sessions, your pain can be greatly reduced and movement can gradually return. You'll be able to scratch your back and put your coat on without grimacing in pain!

## Massage for your shoulder

### Reduce pain and improve mobility



*Massage therapists use trigger point therapy, muscle stretching and other techniques to relieve shoulder pain.*

Massage is a safe treatment that can help relieve pain and restore your shoulder to normal movement — which will surely be your first priority.

Massage, in conjunction with other medical treatments, can help relieve tension and pain whether it's caused by myofascial trigger points, injury, tendinitis or frozen shoulder. Massage therapists can help dissolve these areas of pain using trigger point therapy, frictioning techniques, stretching and hydrotherapy.

Using a variety of massage techniques and gentle joint movements, the painful restrictions that have developed in your shoulder can be released. Your pain can gradually subside and normal movement can return. A treatment plan usually consists of frequent massage therapy sessions over several months, including an individualized program of stretches that you can do at home to help speed recovery.

# Self-care for the shoulders

Practice these tips to stay pain-free

**1. Stretch the shoulders.** Lie face down, propped up on both forearms and elbows. Shift the weight of your chest toward the floor. Then press back to neutral. Repeat 3–5 times a few times a day.

**2. Sit up straight.** Posture can be the root of many shoulder problems. Frequent sitting tends to round our shoulders forward, which stresses the neck and upper back muscles, and restricts arm movement. Develop more awareness of your posture. Stand or sit with your spine erect. Lift your shoulders toward your ears, and then let them fall gently back into position, feeling your shoulder blades drop down your back.



*Move and stretch the shoulders to keep them strong and healthy.*

**3. Stretch and strengthen your shoulders and upper back.** Keeping your spine erect, repeat these movements 5 to 10 times several times a day to loosen tight muscles. 1) Stretch your arms forward, 2) Reach your arms wide behind you, 3) Reach over your head.

**4. Apply heat or cold packs to stiff and painful shoulders.** Heat relaxes your joints and muscles and helps relieve pain. Cold can reduce pain and swelling in specific areas.

**5. Don't exercise a painful, inflamed joint.** Apply heat or cold and rest the joint until the pain goes away. Keep your circulation and the rest of your body moving with exercises that don't strain the shoulder joints. Brisk walking, dancing to music and tai chi are some good ways to keep your whole body healthy.



*The natural healing force within each of us is the greatest force in getting well.*

—Hippocrates