

Frozen Shoulder (Adhesive Capsulitis)

Frozen shoulder, also called adhesive capsulitis, causes pain and stiffness in the shoulder. Over time, the shoulder becomes very hard to move.

After a period of worsening symptoms, frozen shoulder tends to get better, although full recovery may take up to 3 years. Physical therapy, with a focus on shoulder flexibility, is the primary treatment recommendation for frozen shoulder.

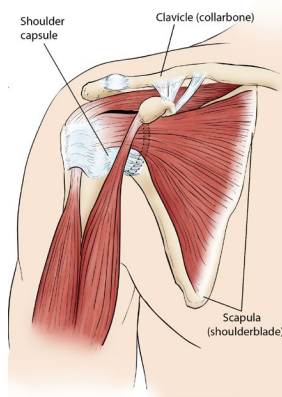
Frozen shoulder most commonly affects people between the ages of 40 and 60, and occurs in women more often than men. In addition, people with diabetes are at an increased risk for developing frozen shoulder.

Anatomy

Your shoulder is a ball-and-socket joint made up of three bones: your upper arm bone (humerus), your shoulder blade (scapula), and your collarbone (clavicle).

The head of the upper arm bone fits into a shallow socket in your shoulder blade. Strong connective tissue, called the shoulder capsule, surrounds the joint.

To help your shoulder move more easily, synovial fluid lubricates the shoulder capsule and the joint.



The shoulder capsule surrounds the shoulder joint and rotator cuff tendons.

Description

In frozen shoulder, the shoulder capsule thickens and becomes stiff and tight. Thick bands of tissue — called adhesions — develop. In many cases, there is less synovial fluid in the joint.

The hallmark signs of this condition are severe pain and being unable to move your shoulder -- either on your own or with the help of someone else. It develops in three stages:

Stage 1: Freezing

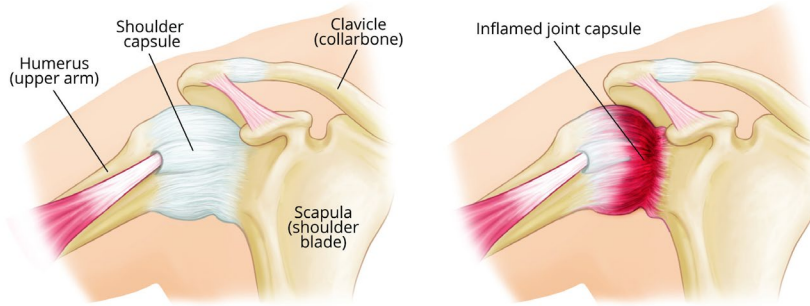
In the "freezing" stage, you slowly have more and more pain. As the pain worsens, your shoulder loses range of motion. Freezing typically lasts from 6 weeks to 9 months.

Stage 2: Frozen

Painful symptoms may actually improve during this stage, but the stiffness remains. During the 4 to 6 months of the "frozen" stage, daily activities may be very difficult.

Stage 3: Thawing

Shoulder motion slowly improves during the "thawing" stage. Complete return to normal or close to normal strength and motion typically takes from 6 months to 2 years.



In frozen shoulder, the smooth tissues of the shoulder capsule become thick, stiff, and inflamed.

Cause

The causes of frozen shoulder are not fully understood. There is no clear connection to arm dominance or

occupation. A few factors may put you more at risk for developing frozen shoulder.

Diabetes. Frozen shoulder occurs much more often in people with diabetes. The reason for this is not known. In addition, diabetic patients with frozen shoulder tend to have a greater degree of stiffness that continues for a longer time before "thawing."

Other diseases. Some additional medical problems associated with frozen shoulder include hypothyroidism, hyperthyroidism, Parkinson's disease, and cardiac disease.

Immobilization. Frozen shoulder can develop after a shoulder has been immobilized for a period of time due to surgery, a fracture, or other injury. Having patients move their shoulders soon after injury or surgery is one measure prescribed to prevent frozen shoulder.

Treatment

Frozen shoulder generally gets better over time, although it may take up to 3 years. The focus of treatment is to control pain and restore motion and strength through physical therapy.

Nonsurgical Treatment

Most people with frozen shoulder improve with relatively simple treatments to control pain and restore motion.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines. Drugs like aspirin and ibuprofen reduce pain and swelling.

Steroid injections. Cortisone is a powerful anti-inflammatory medicine that is injected directly into your shoulder joint.

Physical therapy. Specific exercises will help restore motion. These may be done under the supervision of a physical therapist or via a home program. Therapy includes stretching or range of motion exercises for the shoulder.

Surgical Treatment

If your symptoms are not relieved by therapy and other conservative methods, you and your doctor may discuss surgery. It is important to talk with your doctor about your potential for recovery continuing with simple treatments, and the risks involved with surgery.

