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Improving access to and quality of self-guided physical therapy exercises at home for patients residing in regions with limited resources

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Shoulder Pain

At-home stretches



- **Shoulder pain is a very common musculoskeletal complaints seen by primary care physicians.**
- **This handout contains easy-to-complete exercises that you can do at home to help improve your pain.**
- **These exercises should NOT be painful. If you experience pain, talk to your doctor.**
- **QR codes and links have been added to each video should you need further clarification about any of the exercises or if you would like to confirm that you are performing them correctly.**
- **Do NOT perform any of the exercises that you do not feel comfortable doing alone, it is okay to skip these.**

The following materials were developed by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) and can be found at: <https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/recovery/rotator-cuff-and-shoulder-conditioning-program/rotator-cuff-pdf/>. This handout does not represent medical advice, rather it is intended to help guide patients perform exercises at home to help alleviate shoulder pain.

These materials have been modified to include external links with QR codes to videos of each exercise. These video representations have not been endorsed by the AAOS and were individually selected by the below compiler of this information.

These materials have been compiled as part of a community improvement project requirement of the Family Medicine clerkship completed by third-year medical students at the Larner College of Medicine of the University of Vermont. Please contact Matthew Rzemien, a member of the Class of 2025 with any questions at: matthew.rzemien@med.uvm.edu.



Prepared for: _____

Prepared by: _____

Rotator Cuff and Shoulder Conditioning Program

Purpose of Program

After an injury or surgery, an exercise conditioning program will help you return to daily activities and enjoy a more active, healthy lifestyle. Following a well-structured conditioning program will also help you return to sports and other recreational activities.

This is a general conditioning program that provides a wide range of exercises. To ensure that the program is safe and effective for you, it should be performed under your doctor's supervision. Talk to your doctor or physical therapist about which exercises will best help you meet your rehabilitation goals.

Strength: Strengthening the muscles that support your shoulder will help keep your shoulder joint stable. Keeping these muscles strong can relieve shoulder pain and prevent further injury.

Flexibility: Stretching the muscles that you strengthen is important for restoring range of motion and preventing injury. Gently stretching after strengthening exercises can help reduce muscle soreness and keep your muscles long and flexible.

Target Muscles: The muscle groups targeted in this conditioning program include:

- Deltoids (front, back and over the shoulder)
- Trapezius muscles (upper back)
- Rhomboid muscles (upper back)
- Teres muscles (supporting the shoulder joint)
- Supraspinatus (supporting the shoulder joint)
- Infraspinatus (supporting the shoulder joint)
- Subscapularis (front of shoulder)
- Biceps (front of upper arm)
- Triceps (back of upper arm)

Length of program: This shoulder conditioning program should be continued for 4 to 6 weeks, unless otherwise specified by your doctor or physical therapist. After your recovery, these exercises can be continued as a maintenance program for lifelong protection and health of your shoulders. Performing the exercises 2 to 3 days a week will maintain strength and range of motion in your shoulders.

Getting Started

Warmup: Before doing the following exercises, warm up with 5 to 10 minutes of low impact activity, like walking or riding a stationary bicycle.

Stretch: After the warm-up, do the stretching exercises shown on Page 1 before moving on to the strengthening exercises. When you have completed the strengthening exercises, repeat the stretching exercises to end the program.

Do not ignore pain: You should not feel pain during an exercise. Talk to your doctor or physical therapist if you have any pain while exercising.

Ask questions: If you are not sure how to do an exercise, or how often to do it, contact your doctor or physical therapist.

Additional Notes



Rotator Cuff and Shoulder Conditioning Program

STRETCHING EXERCISES

1. Pendulum <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxgqT6Jn4pc>

Repetitions

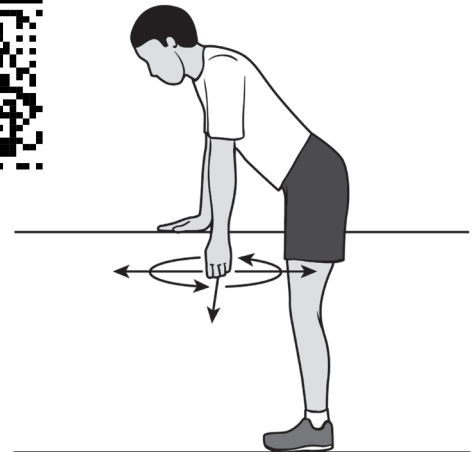
2 sets of 10

Days per week

5 to 6

Main muscles worked: Deltoids, supraspinatus, infraspinatus, subscapularis

Equipment needed: None



Step-by-step directions

- Lean forward and place one hand on a counter or table for support. Let your other arm hang freely at your side.
- Gently swing your arm forward and back. Repeat the exercise moving your arm side-to-side, and repeat again in a circular motion.
- Repeat the entire sequence with the other arm.

Tip Do not round your back or lock your knees.

2. Crossover Arm Stretch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1K0m5ywRcY>

Repetitions

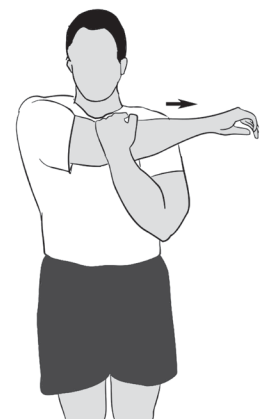
4 each side

Days per week

5 to 6

Main muscles worked: Posterior deltoid
You should feel this stretch at the back of your shoulder

Equipment needed: None



Step-by-step directions

- Relax your shoulders and gently pull one arm across your chest as far as possible, holding at your upper arm.
- Hold the stretch for 30 seconds and then relax for 30 seconds.
- Repeat with the other arm.

Tip Do not pull or put pressure on your elbow.



Rotator Cuff and Shoulder Conditioning Program

STRETCHING EXERCISES

3. Passive Internal Rotation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNAMFoh1k64>

Repetitions

4 each side

Days per week

5 to 6

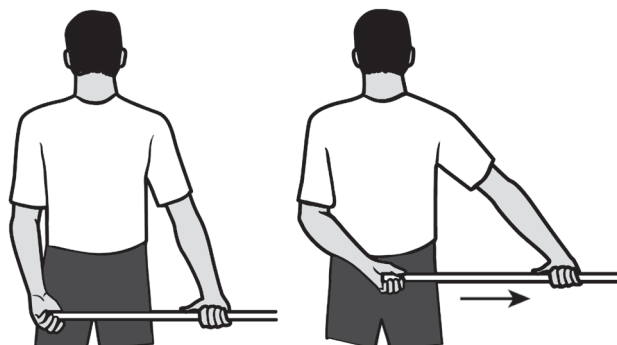
Main muscles worked: Supraspinatus
You should feel this stretch at the front of your shoulder

Equipment needed: Light stick, such as a yardstick



Step-by-step directions

- Hold a stick behind your back with one hand, and lightly grasp the other end of the stick with your other hand.
- Pull the stick horizontally as shown so that your shoulder is passively stretched to the point of feeling a pull without pain.
- Hold for 30 seconds and then relax for 30 seconds.
- Repeat on the other side.



Start

Finish

Tip Do not lean over or twist to side while pulling the stick.

4. Passive External Rotation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbUoLkxYVMY>

Repetitions

4 each side

Days per week

5 to 6

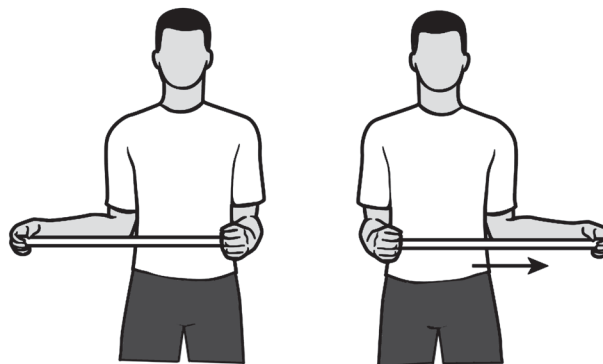
Main muscles worked: Infraspinatus, teres minor
You should feel this stretch in the back of your shoulder

Equipment needed: Light stick, such as a yardstick



Step-by-step directions

- Grasp the stick with one hand and cup the other end of the stick with the other hand.
- Keep the elbow of the shoulder you are stretching against the side of your body and push the stick horizontally as shown to the point of feeling a pull without pain.
- Hold for 30 seconds and then relax for 30 seconds.
- Repeat on the other side.



Start

Finish

Tip Keep your hips facing forward and do not twist.



Rotator Cuff and Shoulder Conditioning Program

STRETCHING EXERCISES

5. Sleeper Stretch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0ERSobj6_I

Repetitions

4 reps, 3x a day

Days per week

Daily

Main muscles worked: Infraspinatus, teres minor

You should feel this stretch in your outer upper back, behind your shoulder

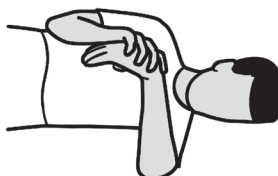
Equipment needed: None

Step-by-step directions

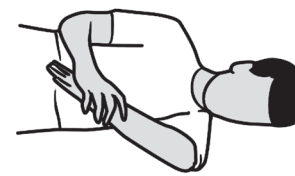
- Lie on your side on a firm, flat surface with the affected shoulder under you and your arm bent, as shown. You can place your head on a pillow for comfort, if needed.
- Use your unaffected arm to push your other arm down. Stop pressing down when you feel a stretch in the back of your affected shoulder.
- Hold this position for 30 seconds, then relax your arm for 30 seconds.



Sleeper position



Start



Finish

Tip Do not bend your wrist or press down on your wrist.

