

# Knowing about your rotator cuff disorder



*The shoulder joint is the most mobile joint in the body and can be quite unstable. It is vulnerable to injuries from sport and falls as well as repetitive movements of the joint. As you get older changes in the soft tissues (ligaments, tendons and muscles) happen. This can make the joint even more prone to injury and may affect how quickly you recover.*

The rotator cuff is the group of four muscles and their tendons that attach to the upper arm and shoulder. With injury these tendons can become irritated, inflamed or swollen and weaken. This can be caused by repetitive arm movements at or above shoulder height, such as swimming or a job that involves continuous overhead work.

Rotator cuff disorders are the most common cause of shoulder pain in people over the age of 35.

Disorders can range from simple tendon irritation through to partial or complete tendon tear.

Pain is common and because of the complicated structure of the shoulder joint and neck, it is important to get an accurate diagnosis.

## Tips to help your recovery

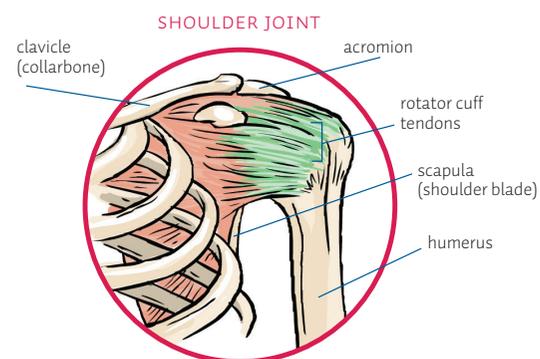
### Initial phase

- See a health professional early.
- Discuss your diagnosis and treatment plan.
- Ask what pain medication is right for you.
- Depending on the type of job or activities you do, your health professional may suggest changed or alternative work duties or time off.
- Contact ACC as soon as possible if you are given a medical certificate for time off work.

### Early rehabilitation phase

- Follow your exercise programme.
- Avoid doing overhead work, heavy lifting or awkward arm actions.

- Work with your doctor, employer and ACC to develop a safe and durable return to work plan.
- Discuss any worries or concerns with your doctor or other health professional.



## Ongoing rehabilitation and prevention

- If your symptoms are not improving by 4-6 weeks you may need a review and referral to an orthopaedic specialist.
- Ask your health professional about a programme of specific exercises to strengthen the muscles around the shoulder joint.

Ask about other rehabilitation options to help your recovery.

### Questions to ask your health professional

- What can be done to treat rotator cuff disorder?
- How will this affect my day-to-day life?
- What exercises can I do?
- Do I need to take time off work?
- Do I need to be completely pain free before returning to work?
- How do I find out about what I can do at work?
- What can I do to help prevent this happening again?

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care or advice.

## Things you can do

- Maintain general body fitness and muscle tone.
- A pillow under your shoulder at night may help you sleep.
- While using your arm, try and keep your shoulder and neck muscles relaxed.
- Keep doing the exercises recommended by your health professional.

## Exercises\*

Ask your health professional if exercising is right for you.



### Range of motion exercise

Stand with your toes close to a wall or door and walk your fingers up the edge of the wall or door as high as you can as shown in the picture. Make sure your shoulder stays as relaxed as possible while you do this.

Your health professional will give you advice about other exercises that are safe for you to do that will help to strengthen and keep your shoulder flexible.

## Staying active

Try to do as much as you can without aggravating or reinjuring your rotator cuff.

The time it takes to return to normal activities increases with the physical demands of the job. Most people in desk jobs can expect to return to their usual activities within a few days. People with physically demanding lives can expect to return to their usual activities by four weeks although tasks that involve heavy lifting may need to be temporarily changed.

### Important facts

- Accurate diagnosis helps ensure better management and a speedy recovery.
- Simple painkillers, such as paracetamol, can help with pain relief and have less risk of serious side effects.

## Everyone has a role to play

... in supporting your return to activity including work.

### You

You can help speed your recovery by carefully following your health professional's advice. Contact ACC if your doctor gives you a medical certificate for time off work so that support can be arranged as soon as possible.



### Your workplace

Your employer can help you with a rehabilitation plan. This may involve restricted hours or different tasks so you can get back to work. Your employer should get in touch with ACC as soon as they can.



### Your Health Practitioner

Your doctor will give you advice and treatment, or referral for treatment. They can also help you plan how you will get better and may check on your progress if needed.



### ACC

ACC can provide you with information, support and guidance throughout your recovery. They will talk to your employer and health professional about ACC programmes that can help you get back to work as soon as you are able.



### Your family

Your family and whanau can help you with everyday tasks and give you support and encouragement to look after yourself and get better. As long as you are following the advice of a registered health professional they can be sure you are in good hands.

# It's better at work



\*To find out more about shoulder exercises or ACC resources call **0508 426 837** or visit **[www.acc.co.nz](http://www.acc.co.nz)**