Shoulder Range of Motion Exercises

The shoulder is the most flexible joint in the human body. Because of this it is also the most unstable joint in the body. All ages can develop shoulder problems. Early treatment of problems is necessary for a good outcome. People react to shoulder pain by decreasing the movement of the joint. After a brief period of time, the shoulder can become “frozen”. This is an almost complete loss of the ability to move the damaged shoulder.

Following injuries your caregivers can give you instructions on exercises to keep your *range of motion* (ability to move your shoulder freely), or regain it if it has been lost.

EXERCISES TO KEEP OR MAINTAIN YOUR SHOULDER'S MOBILITY

CODMAN'S EXERCISE OR PENDULUM EXERCISE

- This exercise may be performed in a *prone* (face-down) lying position or standing while leaning on a chair with the opposite arm. Its purpose is to relax the muscles in your shoulder and slowly but surely increase the range of motion and to relieve pain.
  - Lie on your stomach close to the side edge of the bed. Let your weak arm hang over the edge of the bed. Relax your shoulder, arm and hand. Let your shoulder blade relax and drop down.
  - Slowly and gently swing your arm forward and back. Do not use your neck muscles; relax them. It might be easier to have someone else gently start swinging your arm.
  - As pain decreases, increase your swing. To start, arm swing should begin at 15 degree angles. In time and as pain lessens, move to 30-45 degree angles. Start with swinging for about 15 seconds, and work towards swinging for 3 to 5 minutes.
- This exercise may also be performed in a standing/bent over position.
  - Stand and hold onto a sturdy chair with your good arm. Bend forward at the waist and bend your knees slightly to help protect your back. Relax your weak arm, let it hang limp. Relax your shoulder blade and let it drop.
  - Keep your shoulder relaxed and use body motion to swing your arm in small circles.
  - Stand up tall and relax.
  - Repeat motion and change direction of circles.
  - Start with swinging for about 30 seconds, and work towards swinging for 3 to 5 minutes.

STRETCHING EXERCISES

- #1: Lift your arm out in front of you with the elbow bent at 90 degrees. Using your other arm gently pull the elbow forward and across your body.
- #2: Bend one arm behind you with the palm facing outward. Using the other arm, hold a towel or rope and reach this arm up above your head, then bend it at the elbow to move your wrist to behind your neck. Grab the free end of the towel with the hand behind your back. Gently pull the towel up with the hand behind your neck, gradually increasing the pull on the hand behind the small of your back. Then, gradually pull down with the hand behind the small of your back. This will pull the hand and arm behind your neck further. Both shoulders will have an increased range of motion with repetition of this exercise.

STRENGTHENING EXERCISES

- Standing with your arm at your side and straight out from your shoulder with the elbow bent at 90 degrees, hold onto a small weight and slowly raise your hand so it points straight up in the air. Repeat this five times to begin with, and gradually increase to ten times. Do this four times per day. As you grow stronger you can gradually increase the weight.
- Repeat the above exercise, only this time using an elastic band. Start with your hand up in the air and pull down until your hand is by your side. As you grow stronger, gradually increase the amount you pull by

increasing the number or size of the elastic bands. Use the same amount of repetitions.

- Standing with your hand at your side and holding onto a weight, gradually lift the hand in front of you until it is over your head. Do the same also with the hand remaining at your side and lift the hand away from your body until it is again over your head. Repeat this five times to begin with, and gradually increase to ten times. Do this four times per day. As you grow stronger you can gradually increase the weight.

Do all exercises with weights that are small and easy to use when beginning your exercises. Gradually increase the weight as you grow stronger. Do not do exercises to the point of pain. If your shoulder becomes painful, decrease the number of repetitions or the amount of weight used. As your comfort increases you can gradually return to the same weights, resistance, or number of repetitions.

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