PAIN & INJURY GUIDE

Gym and lifting shoulder pain: your 5-minute routine

Scan for the full guide

A short shoulder strengthening routine of the kind used for rotator cuff related pain, which can be a useful warm-up or home routine for gym-goers.

How often: Once a day, six days a week if you can, and at least four days a week. Improvement can take several weeks, sometimes 12 weeks or more.

Total time: about 6 minutes. **You will need:** a clear wall, a small towel, a table, a pillow.

Before you start

- This is general information based on NHS physiotherapy leaflets. It is not a personal treatment plan. If a doctor, physiotherapist or osteopath has given you different advice, follow that.
- Move slowly and smoothly. Mild discomfort or a stretching feeling is fine. Sharp pain is not.
- The pain should settle back to your usual level within an hour or two. If it is worse the next day, do fewer repeats or a smaller movement, or leave that exercise out for a few days.

Your routine

1 Wall slide

about 3 min

Stand facing a wall holding a small towel between your hands. Rest the edges of your hands on the wall.
Lean your body weight into the wall and slide your hands up as far as is comfortable, then return.

How much: 8 slow repeats, 2 sets, resting a minute between sets

2 Wall push-up

about 2 min

Stand facing a wall with your hands on it slightly wider than your shoulders and your elbows below shoulder height.
Keeping your body tall, lower your chest towards the wall, then push back.

How much: 8 slow repeats, 2 sets

3 Shoulder rotation

about 1 min

Sit beside a table with your elbow supported just below shoulder height on a rolled towel or pillow.
Make a loose fist, keep your elbow bent and slowly turn your forearm up to point at the ceiling, then return.

How much: Up to 20 slow repeats

Good to know

- Pressing and overhead movements in the gym may need to be lighter or changed for a while. Build back up gradually.
- If your symptoms have not improved after 8 to 12 weeks, or are getting worse despite the exercises, see a physiotherapist or your GP.

Easier, or harder?

- Too sore? Do fewer repeats, make the movement smaller, or miss that exercise out for a few days.
- Feeling good? Only add a few repeats, or a second set, when the routine feels easy and comfortable. There is no rush.

Keep track

Tick a box each day you do your routine.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							

Get urgent help first, and do not exercise, if you have any of these

Call 999 straight away if shoulder or arm pain comes with any of these. Shoulder pain can sometimes be referred from the heart.

- Chest pain or pressure, breathlessness, sweating or feeling faint, particularly with pain spreading into the left arm, neck or jaw
- A shoulder that looks out of place or deformed after an injury
- Sudden loss of the ability to lift your arm after a fall

See your GP promptly, or call NHS 111, if

- Pain after a fall or significant injury
- A hot, red, swollen shoulder, especially with a fever
- Unexplained weight loss or constant night pain unrelated to position

Stop these exercises if

- If increased pain lasts more than a few hours after the exercises, do fewer repeats or make the exercises easier.
- If you are not improving after about 4 weeks, or things are getting worse sooner, get it checked. A GP, physiotherapist or osteopath can assess what is going on and adjust your exercises.

Want your problem assessed?

If you would like your symptoms assessed, you are welcome to book an appointment with Lance Peterson Osteopathy in Chichester: lancepetersonosteopathy.co.uk/book.html · 07899 358698. Osteopathic care is not right for everyone, and if something needs medical attention first, you will be told.

The full plain-English guide, with the common questions and sources, is at: lancepetersonosteopathy.co.uk/guide/gym-shoulder-pain.html

Based on

The exercises are described in my own words from these NHS and Chartered Society of Physiotherapy resources. Repeats and holds are kept to the gentle, beginner end of the ranges they give. Links were checked in October 2026.

- Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust: A guide to rotator cuff related shoulder pain
https://leicspart.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/589-Rotator-cuff-related-shoulder-pain.pdf