

PAIN & INJURY GUIDE

Tight shoulders and muscle knots: your 5-minute routine



Scan for the full guide

Gentle stretches and movements for shoulders and neck that feel tight and tired.

How often: Once a day, on most days of the week. Give it a few weeks before judging how it is going.

Total time: about 5 minutes. **You will need:** a sturdy chair.

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

Chest stretch

about 1 min

Sit forward on your chair with your arms by your sides and thumbs pointing forwards. Open your arms out to the sides until you feel a stretch across your chest. Keep your shoulders back and down.

How much: Hold 20 seconds, 2 times

2

Gentle neck turns

about 1 min

Sit or stand tall with your shoulders relaxed. Slowly turn your head to look over one shoulder, as far as is comfortable, then turn to the other side.

How much: 5 turns each way, slowly

3

Gentle side bend

about 1 min

Sit tall. Tip your ear towards your shoulder without lifting the shoulder. Go only as far as is comfortable, then return to the middle and repeat on the other side.

How much: 5 each side

4

Back-of-shoulder stretch

about 2 min

Take the sore arm across your chest towards the opposite shoulder. Use your other hand to gently pull at the elbow until you feel a stretch.

How much: Hold 20 seconds, 3 times

Good to know

- Stretches should feel like a gentle pull, never sharp pain.

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 any neck exercise makes you dizzy, or brings on pins and needles or arm symptoms, stop and speak to your GP.
- 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/tight-shoulders.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.

- Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS: Desk exercises
<https://ourspace.rjah.nhs.uk/personal-fitness/desk-exercises/>
- University Hospitals Sussex NHS Trust: Self treatment of acute neck pain (2025)
<https://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2174.1-Self-treatment-of-acute-neck-pain-2025.pdf>
- Chartered Society of Physiotherapy: Video exercises for neck pain
<https://www.csp.org.uk/conditions/neck-pain/video-exercises-neck-pain>
- Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS: Physiotherapy and frozen shoulder
<https://www.royaldevon.nhs.uk/media/xfdju2ul/physiotherapy-and-frozen-shoulder-276-v4.pdf>