INFORMATION AND EXERCISES

Subacromial Shoulder Pain

Also called rotator cuff tendinopathy or shoulder impingement

Dr Aditya Malik
FRCS (Tr&Orth) Edinburgh
drdityamalik.com

Subacromial pain is the most common cause of shoulder pain. This sheet explains what it is, and sets out three simple exercises which, done regularly, treat it for most people.

HOW OFTEN	EACH EXERCISE	REST	IMPROVEMENT
6 days a week	3 sets of 8	1 minute	6–12 weeks

Understanding subacromial pain

The rotator cuff is a group of tendons that holds the shoulder joint steady as the arm moves. Where these tendons pass beneath the bony point of the shoulder, called the acromion, they and the tissues around them can become irritated and painful. This is subacromial pain.

It causes pain in the shoulder and upper arm, which can spread down the arm or up towards the neck and shoulder blade. It is usually worse when you lift your arm away from your body, reach up, or put your hand behind your back. It can come on gradually, or quite quickly after the shoulder has done much more than usual.

Research shows that the right exercises, done regularly, are an effective treatment. Most people who keep them up improve, without needing an injection or an operation.

Everyday tips

- Keep using your shoulder: muscles need movement, and resting it completely weakens them.
- If pain disturbs your sleep, rest the arm on a pillow, and put a rolled-up pillow behind your back so that you do not roll onto the painful side.
- Step closer to things, rather than stretching out to reach them.
- Keep up general exercise. Even a brisk 20-minute walk three times a week helps recovery.

Easing the pain

- A warm shower, or a hot pack (hot fomentation), before you exercise can make the shoulder more comfortable.
- A cold compress, such as an ice pack wrapped in a thin towel, can ease the pain.
- Painkillers, taken as advised by your doctor, can make it easier to keep up the exercises.
- If pain stops you exercising, ask at the clinic whether an injection would help.

> **If the pain is stopping you from exercising, or you are worried about your shoulder, contact the clinic on +91 99197 03477.**

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- Start only when Dr Malik or your physiotherapist has told you to.
- At first you may only manage a small movement. This will improve with time.
- A small increase in pain while you exercise is fine, as long as it settles within 30 minutes and is no worse the next day. If it is worse, do fewer repetitions next time, then build up again gradually.
- Stop, and contact the clinic, if pain increases sharply or you feel unwell.
- This sheet does not replace individual advice. If it differs from what you were told in clinic, follow the advice you were given there.

The three exercises

Do each exercise in 3 sets of 8, resting for a minute between sets. You can start with two of them, and add the third once you feel confident.

01 Wall slides

Raising the arm, with the wall taking some of its weight.

1. Stand facing a smooth wall with a small cloth under your hands, or clean socks on them, so that they slide easily.
2. Place the little-finger edges of your hands against the wall, thumbs towards you.
3. Step towards the wall as you press gently into it, and slide your hands up as far as you can.
4. Relax, and slide back down to the start.

REPETITIONS	REST	NEXT STEP
3 sets of 8	1 minute between sets	No wall, holding a light weight

02 Push-ups against the wall

Strengthening the muscles around the shoulder and shoulder blade.

1. Stand facing a wall and place your hands on it at shoulder height, a little wider apart than your shoulders, fingers turned slightly out.
2. Keep your elbows lower than your shoulders.
3. Keeping your body straight and tall, bend your elbows to lower yourself towards the wall, then push back.

REPETITIONS	REST	NEXT STEP
3 sets of 8	1 minute between sets	Feet further from the wall

03 Turning the forearm upwards

Strengthening the rotator cuff, which turns the arm outwards.

1. Sit up tall beside a table, with your arm resting on it and your elbow on a rolled-up towel, just below shoulder height.
2. Make a gentle fist and, keeping the elbow bent, turn your forearm until it points upwards.
3. Return slowly to the start, and relax.
4. When this is easy, hold a weight: start with 0.5 kg (a full 500 ml water bottle) and, as it gets easier, build up to 1 kg, then 1.5 kg, then 2 kg.

REPETITIONS	REST	WEIGHT
3 sets of 8	1 minute between sets	0.5 kg, building to 2 kg

Making the exercises work

- Build the exercises into your daily routine, at a time when you are not rushed and can give them your full attention.
- Aim for six days a week, with one day off. To get better, you need to do them on at least four days a week.
- Keep an exercise diary of the repetitions you do, so that you can see your progress.
- If one movement is especially painful, try it once a week as a test of how you are improving.

What to expect

It can take 6 weeks before you notice a change, so keep going. Most people's shoulders feel better within 6 to 12 weeks.

If your shoulder is not improving, or is getting worse despite the exercises, contact the clinic.

Published September 2026 · This sheet is provided for patients under the care of Dr Aditya Malik. It does not replace individual clinical advice. · Medanta Noida & Medanta Defence Colony · +91 99197 03477 · dradityamalik.com