

Shoulder dislocation



Summary points to remember:

- Use this link or QR code to watch a video about a shoulder dislocation: thermh.org.au/vfc
- The shoulder is a ball-and-socket joint. When the shoulder is dislocated the ball of the humerus (upper-arm bone) is out the socket
- Wear your sling for three to four weeks if this is your first dislocation
- This brochure provides some information to assist with management and rehabilitation of your injury. While it contains the recommended information, it does not contain all available information about your injury and is not a substitute for specific advice from the Virtual Fracture Clinic in respect of your injury
- All treatment options have risks and benefits
- If you have any concerns about the progress of your rehabilitation, contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic promptly
- Do not continue the exercises in the brochure if:
 - You experience increasing pain (some discomfort is common)
 - Your condition has deteriorated in any way since you last consulted the Virtual Fracture Clinic
 - You have a new injury or condition and have not consulted the Virtual Fracture Clinic about it
- This information is only designed for patients who are currently being treated by the Virtual Fracture Clinic at the Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH)
- If you do not understand the information seek clarification from the Virtual Fracture Clinic
- Patients should be aware that the suggested management is not guaranteed to provide any improvement in your condition
- Keep this brochure as you may need to read it again



Virtual Fracture Clinic

The Virtual Fracture Clinic gives fast access to a specialist orthopaedic opinion without having to visit the RMH in person. An orthopaedic surgeon will review your case and a staff member will contact you to discuss your management plan.

Your diagnosis is: shoulder dislocation

The shoulder is a ball-and-socket joint. It is the most mobile joint in the body. When the shoulder is dislocated the ball of the humerus (upper-arm bone) is out the socket.

Shoulder dislocations are common. They are often caused by getting hit in the back of the shoulder, especially if the arm is in a throwing position.

There can be other complications such as a fracture, damage to the ligaments or muscles around the shoulder, and nerve or artery damage.



Early management: the first 72 hours

It is normal for your shoulder to become bruised and swollen. This will settle over a few weeks. Follow these guidelines to help with any pain and swelling:

Rest: Avoid any activity that increases your pain.

Ice: Ice your shoulder for **20 minutes every one to two hours**. Use an ice pack, bag of frozen vegetables or crushed ice wrapped in a towel. Do not place ice directly on your skin. Continue for **three to 10 days** after your injury.

Sling

Wear a sling to support the arm for:

- Three to four weeks for a first-time dislocation
- Until comfortable for a recurrent dislocation

Your fingers should be slightly higher than your elbow when resting in the sling. Remove the sling for showers and sleeping, if comfortable.



Lifting

For the first six weeks do not lift anything weighing **more than five kilograms** with your injured arm.

Medication

Simple medication such as paracetamol or NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) may help to control your pain.

Speak with your General Practitioner (GP, also called your local doctor or family doctor) or pharmacist about medication options.

Smoking

Research shows that smoking increases the risk of poor healing after an injury. Stopping smoking will improve the chance of a good outcome.

For further information on quitting smoking visit quitnow.gov.au or speak with your GP.

Rehabilitation exercises: after 48-72 hours

Remove the sling and perform these exercises four times a day:

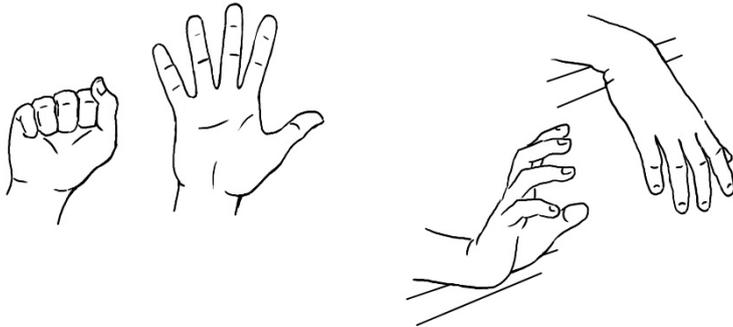
- Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears and then down. Repeat 10 times



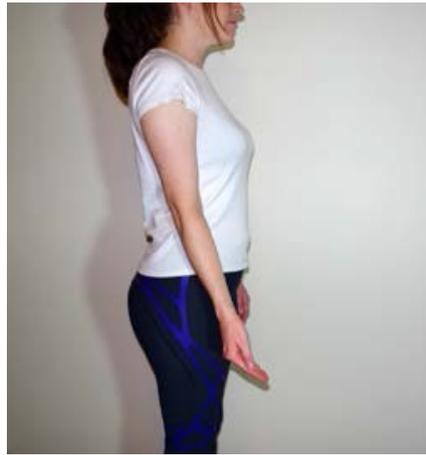
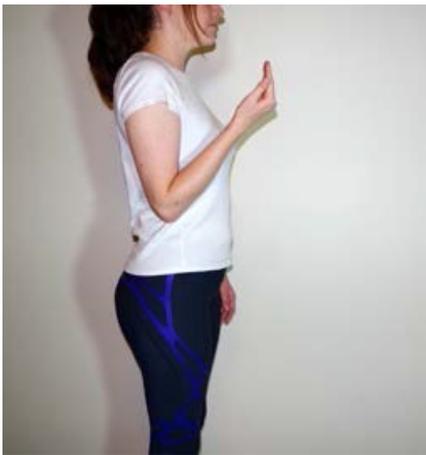
- Squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for five seconds then rest. Repeat 10 times



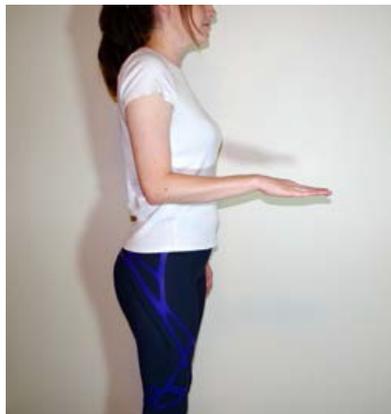
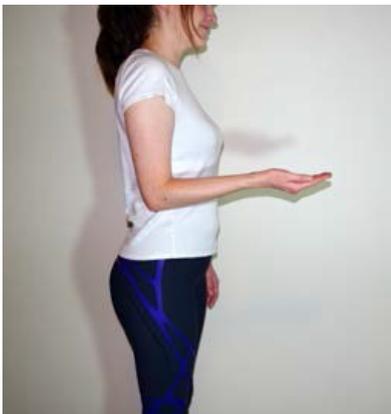
- Open and close your hand, and move your wrist up and down. Repeat 10 times each



- Bend and straighten your elbow. Use your good arm to help, if needed. Repeat 10 times



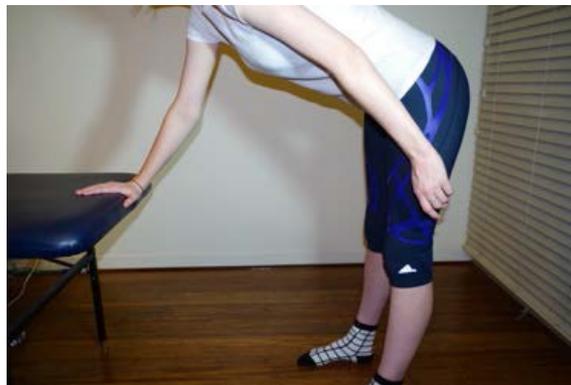
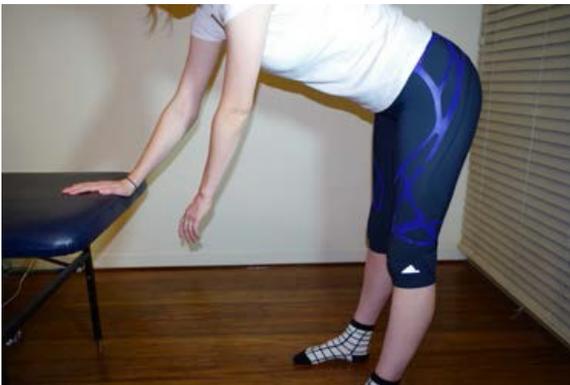
- Start with your elbow bent to 90 degrees by your side. Rotate your palm up and down to feel a mild stretch. Repeat 10 times



After one week, add these exercises

- Lean forward supporting yourself with your good arm. Hang your injured arm down. Gently swing the injured arm:
 - In circles
 - Front to back
 - Side to side

Repeat 10 times each direction



- Lie on your back. Use your good arm to lift your injured arm off your chest. Repeat 10 times



- Use your good arm to lift your injured arm up to the front. Repeat 10 times



- Stand with your elbow bent to 90 degrees and tucked into your side. Use an umbrella or stick to rotate the injured arm outwards. Hold for five seconds. Repeat 10 times



Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy rehabilitation is important after a shoulder dislocation.

Speak with your GP about physiotherapy options in your area, or contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic to arrange physiotherapy at the RMH.

Expected return to daily activities

Different people recover from injuries at different rates.

Return to driving

- First-time shoulder dislocation
 - You can return to driving six weeks after your injury but you can be cleared sooner by a doctor or physiotherapist if your strength is restored
- Recurrent shoulder dislocation
 - You can return to driving when comfortable

Return to work

The amount of time you will need off work relates to the severity of your injury and your work requirements. Discuss your return-to-work plan with your GP and employer.

As a guide:

- Manual workers: If you need to climb ladders or do repetitive lifting it may take six to 10 weeks to return to normal duties
- Desk workers: You can return as soon as your pain allows

Return to sport

It is recommended that you see a physiotherapist for a guided return-to-sport program.

Future appointments

If this was your first dislocation

Most people don't need to see a specialist after their first shoulder dislocation. You should complete a rehabilitation program with a physiotherapist. If you have symptoms six months after the injury despite rehabilitation, speak to your GP to be referred back for review.

If this was not your first dislocation, or you are aged younger than 20 or older than 35

You will have an appointment with a shoulder specialist at the hospital (Medicare bulk-billed) three to four weeks after your injury. **Please contact us if you do not receive notification of this appointment.**

Longer term recovery and expectations

Most people regain full movement of their shoulder and return to daily activities in three to six weeks. Occasionally people have ongoing problems such as:

- Feelings that the shoulder is unstable, especially with overhead movements
- Further dislocations – risks are higher if you are aged under 30 years, are male, play contact sport or work with your arms overhead

Contact

Contact the Virtual Fracture Clinic if:

- You have not heard from us **two working days** after your Emergency Department visit
- Your pain is so bad that medication and RICE (rest, ice, compression and elevation) do not help
- You notice increasing pain without a cause after it was improving
- You notice major numbness, pins and needles, or changes in circulation in your hand or arm
- Your symptoms are still bad after six weeks

Contact

Virtual Fracture Clinic
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Practitioner / Patient notes

