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## HEALTH - Don't shoulder pain, seek help says Less Pain, More Gain

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Does shoulder pain keep you awake at night? Is changing the light bulb is not as easy as it used to be? Is lifting your ballroom dance partner getting more difficult? Well, you are not alone.

More than one million Canadians suffer similar problems.

The good news is many health practitioners such as physiotherapists, massage therapists and chiropractors are highly trained to assist you in preventing or in rehabilitation of shoulder injuries.



Photo : Stock image  
More than one million Canadians suffer from shoulder pain. Get help when it happens to you.

In complex shoulder conditions, recent advances in diagnostic imaging and surgical procedures such as arthroscopic techniques now offer improvement of quality of life by shortening recovery time for many patients.

But why are shoulder problems this common?

The answer is the shoulder is a highly mobile joint, which gives us the ability to easily engage in simple tasks such as buckling a seat-belt to complex movements such as throwing a ball. Because of its high level of mobility, this joint has heavy reliance on the surrounding muscles to act as dynamic stabilizers during movements of the arm.

Weakness of these stabilizing muscles, poor posture, repetitive shoulder movements while working in poorly ergonomic designed work stations, in combination with structural abnormalities, make the shoulder particularly prone to pain and injuries.

Typically the initial shoulder pain is a result of over-activity or sports injury and gradually improves within days or weeks.

Simple methods of pain control such as rest, applying ice or heat, stretching and over-the-counter pain medication are usually sufficient to manage the condition.

However, if the problem lingers or worsens, it is a good idea to seek medical attention both to control pain and possibly inflammation and to prevent further complications such as developing chronic tendonitis or frozen shoulder.

Like any other joint, the shoulder is prone to wear and tear as we age, therefore shoulder arthritis is commonly seen in older adults. Some other more common problems include tendonitis and impingement syndrome, rotator cuff tears and adhesive capsulitis (frozen shoulder).

### Tendonitis and Impingement Syndrome

Tendonitis is the most common cause of shoulder pain and represents inflammation of the rotator cuff tendon.

Often this follows minor trauma from overuse or general deconditioning of shoulder muscles, but it may occur for no apparent reason and probably relates to thinning of the tendons and muscles as we age.

Symptoms usually include activity-related pain that worsens with overhead activities. In its more severe form, tendonitis can progress to impingement syndrome, in which the tissue in the shoulder becomes swollen and pinched against the roof of the shoulder joint as the arm is raised.

Mild symptoms often can be treated with anti-inflammatory medications and physiotherapy. More severe or persistent symptoms are often effectively treated with cortisone injections or surgery.

### Rotator cuff tears

The rotator cuff is a group of muscles surrounding shoulder joint and mainly connect shoulder blade and the arm bone and shoulder joint together while the arm moves.

Sudden loss of movement or strength in the shoulder and pain are often indicative of a rotator cuff overuse or injury. Thinning of rotator cuff tissue can also cause a tear without any apparent injury and typically occurs in people 50 and older. Small or incomplete tears often can be treated with rehabilitation exercises and anti-inflammatory medication.

Major tears can be treated with minimally invasive arthroscopic techniques that require only a few incisions followed by intensive physiotherapy and rehabilitation.

### Adhesive capsulitis/frozen shoulder

Frozen shoulder commonly occurs in people 50 and older and is more prevalent among diabetic patients. Often the shoulder becomes progressively more painful and stiff, and patients can't recall an injury or incident causing pain. A frozen shoulder will improve with time, but several treatments can help reduce the pain and time required to get the shoulder back to normal.

### Less pain translates to more gain

Stay active and strong to prevent pain and injuries, but don't ignore your pain. If shoulder pain, weakness or a loss of range of motion has begun to affect your daily activities and doesn't appear to be improving on its own, a visit with a medical practitioner knowledgeable in treating shoulder conditions is recommended.

**Note:** This information should not be used as a substitute for necessary consultations with a qualified health care professional. Always consult a medically trained professional with questions and concerns you have regarding your medical condition.

Gita Mikal is the founder of Pain Management & Fibromyalgia Centre and Physiotherapy at Don Mills. Gita is a practicing physiotherapist with post-graduate training in pain management. She incorporates a variety of therapeutic techniques such as manual therapy, acupuncture and pain education in her treatments. Visit [www.physioatdonmills.com](http://www.physioatdonmills.com) or call 416-444-4800.

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