

Keeping My Shoulders Healthy As I Age



Musculoskeletal disorders are commonly experienced by older adults and are directly related to a decline in general health and a reduced quality of life, with the shoulder joint commonly being affected. Studies have revealed

that the prevalence of shoulder pain in the general adult population ranges from 6.9% to 31%; however, the prevalence of shoulder pain peaks in individuals aged 45 to 64 years. It's not just shoulder pain that poses an issue

with aging; shoulder range of motion is also affected. It has been found that shoulder range of motion decreases by approximately 6 degrees per decade in both men and women aged 55 to 86 years.

Common Shoulder Issues in Older Individuals Your shoulders are integral for your mobility and independence – healthy and pain free shoulders are critical for positioning your hands to do everyday tasks such as combing your hair, putting on or taking off a shirt, driving a car, lifting groceries, etc.; therefore, keeping your shoulders healthy as you age is critical to experience an optimal quality of life.

Each shoulder joint includes the shoulder blade, humerus (upper arm bone), and clavicle (collarbone). The rotator cuff is the group of muscles and tendons that help you rotate and raise your arm, while the bursa is a small cushion that protects the shoulder joint by reducing friction between the bones and the tendons of the shoulder. Over time, wear and tear of the joint can result in arthritis, as well as rotator cuff tears. Additionally, inflammation of the protective bursa, and tendinitis, can occur when the joint is overloaded, experiences a trauma, or repetitively works with poor mechanics, or as a result of poor body posture.

Physiotherapy for Healthy Shoulders

Physiotherapy can help to maintain the health of your shoulders as you age. After a thorough assessment of your shoulder joint, which always includes examining your neck and back posture, your physiotherapist will develop a treatment plan that may involve a variety of therapies. These may include manual therapy, modalities such as ice and heat, as well as exercises to stretch and strengthen the shoulder joint and improve posture.

Simple Shoulder Exercises

Below are a few simple shoulder exercises that your physiotherapist *may recommend* to keep your shoulders healthy as you age. These exercises are for examples only. Exercise prescriptions are based on each patient's condition - contact us for advice prior to beginning any exercises on your own.

Shoulder Pendulum - this one is especially great if you have an acute injury or a stiff shoulder

- Begin in a forward bending position using a chair for support.

- Let your right arm hang toward the ground and rock your trunk side to side your trunk so it moves your arm in a circular pattern, both clockwise and counterclockwise (like you are pretending to be an elephant).
- Perform 5 circular motions in each direction.
- Aim to perform this exercise 3 to 5 times per day on each side of the body.

Scapular Retraction

- Begin in a standing position and raise your shoulders.
- Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- Pull your shoulder blades down and together.
- Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- Aim for 10 repetitions of this exercise.

Doorway Stretch

- Position yourself in a doorway with your arms on the wall slightly above your head.
- Lean forward slightly, feeling a slight stretch in the front of your shoulders.
- Hold this position for 20 seconds.
- Slowly return to the starting position.
- Aim for 3 to 5 repetitions of this stretch.

Isometric Shoulder External Rotation

- Position yourself in a doorway with your right elbow bent to a 90-degree angle with the back of your forearm against the doorframe.
- Push your right forearm into the wall without moving your elbow.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Aim for 3 sets of 10 repetitions of this exercise on each side of the body.

Isometric Shoulder Internal Rotation

- Position yourself in a doorway with your right elbow bent to a 90-degree angle with the palm of your hand positioned against the doorframe.
- Push your palm in toward the doorframe without letting your elbow move.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Aim for 3 sets of 10 repetitions of this exercise on each side of the body.

If you're looking to keep your shoulders healthy as you age, you may benefit from physiotherapy, which will involve an individualized treatment plan that is tailored specifically to your shoulder symptoms. You will work with your physiotherapist to set goals and track your progress as you work through your treatment plan.

Undergoing a physiotherapy assessment is one of the best ways to keep your shoulders healthy as you age. After the assessment, our physiotherapists will create a program that is specific to your needs, and set you on the right path toward optimal functioning of your shoulder joints.

References

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