

Exercises for the shoulder

PATIENT INFORMATION FROM YOUR DOCTOR

If you've had a problem with your rotator cuff, including a tear requiring an operation, four kinds of exercises will help you strengthen your shoulder and reduce the chances of hurting it again. For each exercise, aim for 10-12 repetitions per set, and start with 2-3 sets each day. Continue them as long as your doctor recommends. If you've had a serious rotator cuff injury or an operation to repair a cuff tear, keep the 6/12 rule in mind: Expect to work for 6 months before comfortably raising your arm above shoulder height and for about 12 months before working overhead with your usual strength. If you have bursitis, let it cool down completely before starting to do these exercises.

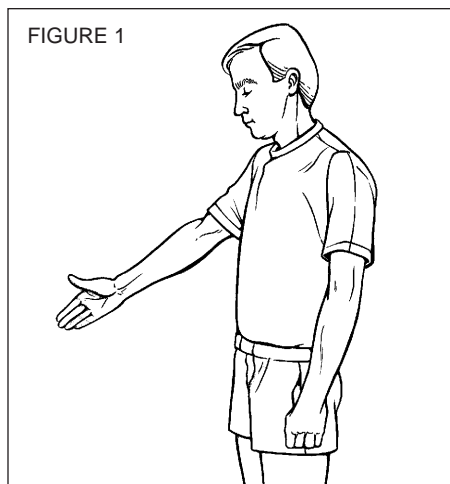
Gentle stretching

Stretch your arm gently in four directions—across the body, up the back, to the side, and overhead—for 3-5 minutes 5-10 times a day (but no more, unless your doctor tells you otherwise). This may sound simple—so simple you might be tempted not to bother—but this gentle program is the single most important part of shoulder rehabilitation. It works even if previous treatment has failed.

Overall shoulder strength

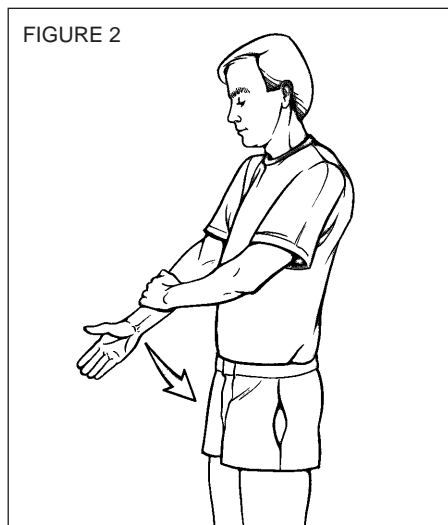
Raise your straightened, relaxed arm while holding a comfortable amount of weight (or, initially, none at all). Don't go higher than about 60 degrees from your body, and work your shoulder with the arm about 30-40 degrees to the side rather than straight in front of you or straight out to the side (see Figure 1). After holding your arm up for a count of

FIGURE 1



2, bring the other arm over and push the exercising arm down as you lower it to your side (see Figure 2). Keep your hand in the thumb-up position.

FIGURE 2



External rotator strength

This exercise requires using something elastic, like surgical tubing, bungee cords, or Theraband. Either sitting or standing, hold your elbow, bent 90 degrees, at your side with your hand against your stomach and grasping one end of the elastic. Rotate your arm out to the side as far as you can without pain. Then, as you rotate it back in, pull the other end of the elastic with your other hand in the same direction to keep up the tension (see



Exercises for the shoulder continued

Figure 3). By varying how hard you pull, you can take your exercising shoulder through a complete range of motion without too much or too little tension at any point. Some people prefer to use dumbbells: You can lie on your side and lift free weights, using the opposite hand to provide the additional resistance. Place a pillow between the working arm and your body for greater comfort.

Internal rotator strength

This exercise is similar to working the external rotators, but you start in out-

ward rotation and bring your hand in to your stomach. Hold one end of the elastic in your hand, and tie the other end to a fixed object like a doorknob or bed frame. Keeping your arm bent 90 degrees at the elbow with your upper arm at your side, start with your forearm out as far as is comfortable (see Figure 4). Now swing your forearm in toward your stomach, keeping your upper arm firmly tucked against your side.

If you have questions about any of these exercises, do not hesitate to call your doctor.

FIGURE 3

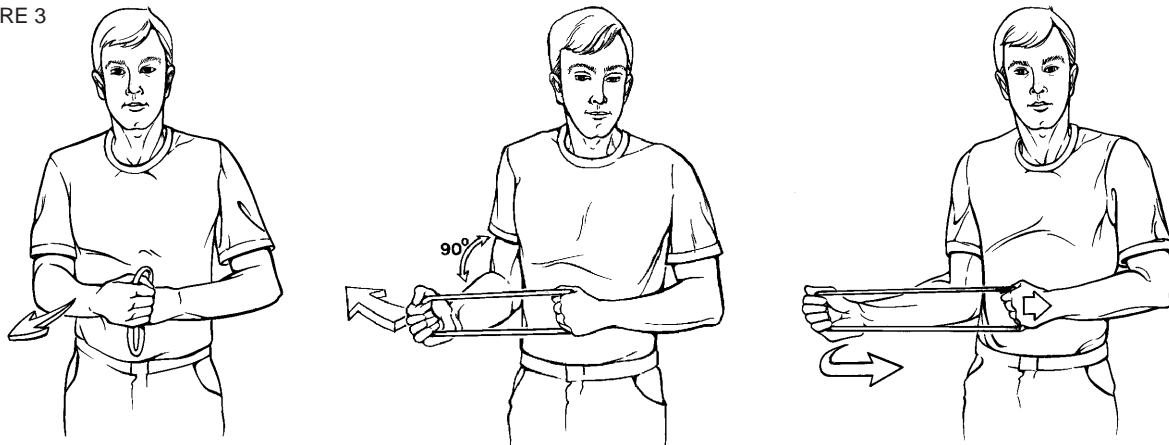


FIGURE 4

