

Patient Information

Shoulder Pain – Sub-Acromial Pain Syndrome (SAPS)

Barts Health Physiotherapy Website:

www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/physiotherapy



What is Sub-Acromial Pain Syndrome?

Sub-acromial pain syndrome is pain felt in the shoulder. The pain can be felt at the front, back or side of the shoulder. It is called sub-acromial pain syndrome because it is believed that pain is mainly felt in an area in the shoulder called the sub-acromial space (see below).



What can cause sub-acromial pain?

There are many factors that can lead to shoulder pain of this type. One of the following may contribute:

- Bony changes — sometimes early wear and tear in the joint can lead to impingement symptoms
- Shoulder instability — This can be because of weakness of the shoulder, over stretched soft tissues in the shoulder (e.g. ligaments) or previous dislocation of the shoulder
- Tightness — the capsule of your shoulder joint can become tight and can lead to pain
- Posture — poor posture may alter the position and movement of your shoulder blade and shoulder
- Soft tissue changes e.g. swelling or thickening of a pocket of soft tissue in the shoulder joint (called a 'bursa') and/or rotator cuff muscles / tendons.

What are the symptoms?

- Pain around the front, side or back of the shoulder
- Pain is often felt on lifting the arm above your head or putting your hand behind back
- Pain is often made worse with overhead work
- Heaviness of the arm
- Clicking or Grinding feelings
- Stiffness of the shoulder

What can I do to help reduce my pain / symptoms?

- Do not avoid using the arm completely. Try and reduce the movements that cause your pain.
- Try and have a good posture, for example sitting upright at a desk
- Simple pain relief such as paracetamol and non-specific anti-inflammatories (NSAIDS) may help (e.g. Ibuprofen). Discuss with your pharmacist or GP.

What other treatments are available?

- Physiotherapy. If your pain does not improve, your GP might refer you to physiotherapy. The physiotherapist will assess you, give you advice about how to manage your pain, and give you exercises.
- Steroid injections. This is normally only used if other treatments have not worked.
- In very rare cases a surgical procedure called sub-acromial decompression (SAD) can be performed. This is usually only considered if all other forms of management have failed.

What exercises can I do to reduce my symptoms?



- Stand next to a wall.
- Push outwards against wall for 5 seconds.
- Repeat 10 times



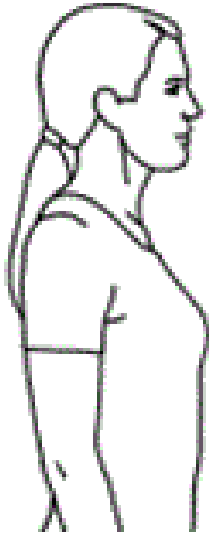
- Stand facing a wall.
- Push your fist against the wall for 5 seconds.
- Repeat 10 times.
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- Stand sideways against a wall as shown
- Push out in to the wall with your arm
- Hold 5 seconds.
- Repeat 10 times

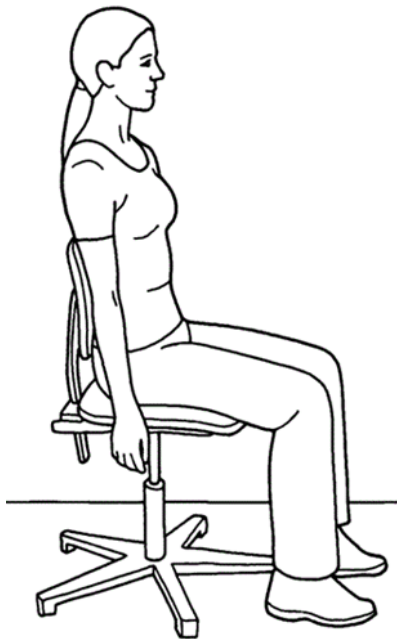


- Support your forearm against a door frame or corner.
- Twist your upper body away from the arm until you feel a stretch.
- Hold 30 seconds,
- Repeat 3 times



- Stand or sit.
- Move your shoulder blades gently back and up (small movement)
- Repeat 10 times.

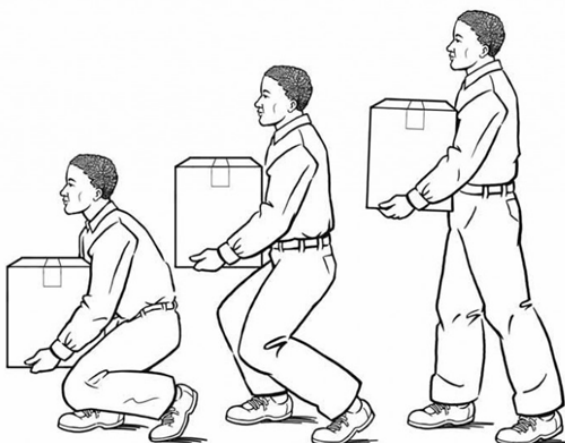
What else can I do to help my symptoms?



Maintain a good sitting posture, especially if you sit for long periods.

Think about:

- Having your feet on the ground
- Sitting against the back rest
- Ensuring your computer is at eye level
- Not twisting, overreaching or being too close to your workstation



When lifting objects:

- Make sure it is not too heavy
- Get close to the object
- Bend your knees
- Stagger your stance
- Face forwards

References

1. www.shoulderdoc.co.uk
2. www.physio-pedia.com

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www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals

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