

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Unfreezing The Shoulder

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Last week in Frozen Shoulder - Part One I tried to make everyone aware of what the problem actually is. At the end of the article I was talking about frozen shoulder in diabetic patients.

It is a very big problem in people with diabetes. While frozen shoulder does occur in other patients too, more than half of the people I see with frozen shoulder have diabetes.

Controlling blood sugar during treatment for frozen shoulder is just as important as it is when I do surgery or treat wounds at the Wound Treatment Center.

Stages of Frozen Shoulder

- **Pain Stage**
Pain starts and any movement seems to make it worse. So naturally you stop using it and at the same time the shoulder is losing motion and becoming stiff.
- **Frozen Stage**
Pain may begin to decrease, shoulder becomes stiffer, daily activities become limited.
- **Thawing Stage**
Motion begins to improve. Pain continues to some degree. It can take several months for the shoulder to “thaw”.

Treatment

I'm sure that there are lots of patients who go through the stages, never have any professional treatment and are left with a shoulder that won't move. That is sad because treatment is available if you don't wait too long.

- **Pain**
To decrease pain and inflammation at the same time you can't beat Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil). If you can't take that, I use Naproxen. I like the stronger prescription form of both better than OTC that you can buy. Stronger pain medication may be needed, but it is habit forming and doesn't treat inflammation.
- **Injection(s)**
Ouch! I know you don't want this. But it can be very helpful and works better early on. I numb the shoulder first and use Ultrasound to be sure the injection goes into the right place. Occasionally a second injection is needed.
- **Stretching**
No matter what stage, shoulder stretching exercises are an essential part of treatment. If you haven't lost too much movement, I may be able to show you some exercises to do at home. More often though, I will involve a Physical Therapist who will do some hands on therapy as well as teach you valuable exercises to do yourself at home.
- **Strengthening**

As your shoulder “thaws” you will need to do exercises to strengthen the many shoulder muscles that have become very weak. This involves the rotator cuff among other muscles that stabilize the shoulder.

- TENS
Some therapists find a transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulator to be helpful in pain relief.
- EUA
If treatment is not progressing very fast, I will often use a procedure called Exam Under Anesthesia. At the hospital, as an outpatient, the patient is fully anesthetized. Then I can gently move the shoulder through a range of motion, separating adhesions in the process. Patients then return to PT the next day. These are among my most grateful patients.
- Arthroscopic Surgery
If everything fails I may need to do arthroscopic surgery to remove scar tissue, adhesions inside the joint. This is also done under anesthesia as an outpatient.

Well there you have it. The 2 part course about what “Frozen Shoulder” is and what I do to treat it.

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