



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Shoulder Instability

Issued by the Physiotherapy Department

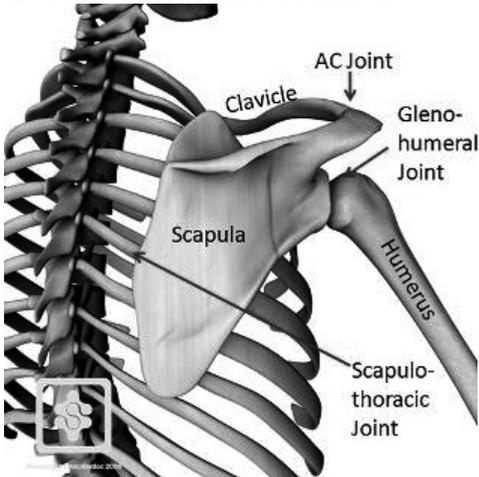




This leaflet provides information about shoulder instability.

## About your shoulder

The shoulder consists of a ball and shallow socket (the gleno-humeral joint). The shoulder is the most mobile joint in the body with a large amount of movement available.



## What is instability?

There is a balance between having a lot of movement at the shoulder joint while maintaining the ball on the socket. In the case of instability this mechanism is affected and excessive movement of the ball on the socket can occur. This may lead to symptoms such as clicking, pain and apprehension, or worry about certain movements.

If the joint is too loose or the muscles are not working normally you may experience the ball sliding partially off the socket, this is called subluxation. If the ball comes completely out of the socket this is called dislocation and may need assistance to be put back into place.

The main structures which keep the joint in position are:

- Ligaments which hold bones together
- Cartilage which deepens the socket to help the ball stay in place
- Muscles which control the joint when moving the arm.

## Treatment for shoulder instability

Treatment depends on several factors but physiotherapy is generally accepted as the initial treatment of choice.

Instability can start at a very young age often described as a 'party trick' for example putting your own shoulder out of joint on purpose. This should be stopped immediately as it will make the problem worse.

## Aims of Physiotherapy

- **Retrain movement and control** – this is the most important aspect of treatment as you can develop altered ways of moving which need to be corrected
- **Strengthen muscles** – once control has improved, the weakened muscles around the joint need to be strengthened
- **Return to sport or activity** – rehabilitation will then be tailored to your individual needs.

## Benefits of exercise

- Help reduce pain
- Improve control around the shoulder area
- Return to normal activities.

## Potential risks

- If an exercise increases your pain then either reduce
  - the number of repetitions
  - the effort
  - or how often you do them.
- Your joint should not 'come out' while doing the exercises.

These are an example of basic exercises. Stop if your symptoms worsen or if you feel apprehensive or worried about your shoulder coming out of joint.



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Lean gently onto a table and hold for 10 seconds, repeat 10 times. You can progress by slightly transferring weight between your hands as demonstrated in first picture.

Gently slide your hands up a wall or mirror using a towel, repeat 10 times as demonstrated in second picture.

Every individual is different and may require an exercise programme tailored to help specific problems at your shoulder.

## Alternative treatments

- Cortisone injections (consult your doctor).
- Anti-inflammatory medications (consult your doctor)

These may help reduce your pain in the short term but it is still important to correct any faulty movement habits.

## Surgery

For people who develop instability without trauma, or with no obvious cause the best treatment is physiotherapy. If the instability is a result of trauma, for example as a result of an accident, and there is a structural problem within the joint then surgery might be appropriate.

**Further advice is available from the Physiotherapy Department  
where you are having your treatment:**

North Tyneside General Hospital  
0191 2932723

Wansbeck General Hospital  
01670 564010

Hexham General Hospital  
01434 655031



## **Alternative Formats**

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

## **Other sources of information**

### **NHS 111**

### **NHS Choices**

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### **NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)**

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### **Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**

General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)

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