

SHOULDER PAIN AND ROTATOR CUFF



Progressive Loading and Physiotherapy Guide

♦ INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this guide, you are probably experiencing shoulder pain that is limiting your daily activities, sleep, or training.

The first thing we want to tell you is this:

👉 **you are not alone, and this is a very common condition.**

Many terms are often used, such as:

- rotator cuff tendinopathy
- subacromial impingement
- supraspinatus tendinitis
- subacromial shoulder pain
- painful shoulder syndrome

as if they were exactly the same thing.

👉 **Although these problems are closely related, there are some small differences.**

The rotator cuff is made up of a group of muscles and tendons that help to:

- stabilise the shoulder
- lift the arm
- move the arm overhead
- control shoulder movement during daily activities

In some cases, pain may be more related to irritation or overload of the tendons, especially the supraspinatus tendon.

In other cases, there may be increased sensitivity and irritation of the tissues around the subacromial space during certain shoulder movements.

👉 **In practice, these structures often work together and symptoms frequently overlap.**

For this reason, this protocol has been designed to help with conditions related to:

- ✓ shoulder pain
- ✓ pain when lifting the arm
- ✓ rotator cuff tendinopathy
- ✓ supraspinatus tendinitis
- ✓ subacromial impingement
- ✓ shoulder tissue irritation
- ✓ shoulder overload

Although symptoms can sometimes be frustrating or persistent, in most cases this is **not a serious injury**, but rather a problem related to the tissue's ability to tolerate and adapt to load.

This guide was created to help you begin a physiotherapy process that is:

- ✓ simple
- ✓ progressive
- ✓ safe
- ✓ based on gradual loading and controlled movement

♦ **UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM**

Rotator cuff pain is often related to irritation or overload of the shoulder tendons, especially the supraspinatus and other muscles that help stabilise the joint.

These tissues work constantly during movements such as:

- lifting the arm

- pushing or carrying weight
- reaching overhead
- training or repetitive movements
- maintaining shoulder stability

When the load exceeds the tissue's ability to adapt, symptoms may appear, such as:

- shoulder pain
- discomfort when sleeping on that side
- pain while lifting the arm
- weakness or lack of control
- discomfort during overhead movements

👉 **This does not necessarily mean the tissue is seriously damaged.**

It often means the area is irritated and needs proper load management and gradual exercise progression.

♦ **IMPORTANT CONCEPT**

One of the most common mistakes is:

- ✗ completely stopping all movement
- ✗ or continuing to train while ignoring the pain

👉 **The correct approach is based on:**

- load management
- gradual progression
- specific exercises
- controlled movement

👉 This allows the shoulder tissues to progressively adapt and improve over time.

♦ **HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM**

👉 **This is not a random list of exercises.**

It is a physiotherapy-based protocol designed to:

- ✓ reduce pain
- ✓ improve shoulder load tolerance
- ✓ restore strength and stability
- ✓ improve movement control

Perform the exercises calmly, without forcing the movement, and always maintaining good control throughout the exercise.

💣 EXERCISES

♦ FREQUENCY

👉 Perform the program **2–3 times per week** for approximately **1 month**.

- ✅ slow and controlled execution
- ✅ movement quality before quantity
- ✅ consistency is key 🔑

♦ WHAT YOU MAY FEEL

During the exercises, or even a few hours afterwards, you may notice:

- slight discomfort
- a feeling of tension or muscular fatigue
- moderate shoulder sensitivity

👉 In many cases, this is completely normal.

⚠️ The important thing is to avoid:

- ❌ intense pain
- ❌ sharp pain
- ❌ a significant increase in symptoms lasting many hours

👉 If this happens, simply reduce the load, range of movement, or exercise intensity.

♦ WHAT TO EXPECT

Improvement in shoulder pain and rotator cuff symptoms is usually **not immediate**.

The process requires:

- time
- repetition
- gradual progression

- progressive tissue adaptation

👉 With consistency, in most cases the pain will gradually improve.

📊 From the first month, you should begin to notice:

- a gradual reduction in pain intensity
- better tolerance to shoulder movements
- greater confidence during daily activities

This does not necessarily mean the pain will disappear immediately, but you should progressively start feeling better during movement and everyday tasks.

👉 **LET'S BEGIN...**

Remember:

⚠️ work with a **small and tolerable discomfort**, not with intense pain.

👉 Mild discomfort can help stimulate adaptation and improvement.

❌ Too much pain may excessively irritate the tissues.

❌ Completely avoiding effort may also slow progress and limit improvement.

1 EXTERNAL ROTATION ISOMETRIC HOLD (ROTATOR CUFF)



Position:

Stand near a wall and use a light resistance band.
Keep the elbow close to the body at approximately 90°.

Execution:

Gently push outward without actually moving the arm, keeping the elbow as close to the trunk as possible, until you feel a small and tolerable discomfort.

- 👉 Keep the tension steady and controlled
 - 👉 Avoid lifting the shoulder during the exercise
-

Sets:

3–5 sets of 20–40 seconds

Why is it important?

Helps reduce pain and activate the rotator cuff muscles without excessively overloading irritated tissues.

Isometric contractions are often well tolerated during more sensitive phases of shoulder pain.

What should you notice?

- 👉 gradual reduction in pain
- 👉 greater feeling of shoulder stability
- 👉 better tolerance to shoulder movement

2 WALL SLIDE WITH SCAPULAR CONTROL

<https://youtube.com/shorts/jt4ktg6YmmM>

Position:

Stand facing a wall with your forearms almost resting against it and your elbows slightly bent.

You may use a light resistance band around the wrists if the exercise is well tolerated.

Execution:

Slowly slide your arms upward along the wall while maintaining good movement control.

Stop earlier if you cannot comfortably reach overhead yet — we will improve this gradually over time.

Then slowly return to the starting position.

- 👉 Keep the shoulders relaxed
- 👉 Avoid arching the lower back
- 👉 Avoid excessively shrugging the shoulders
- 👉 Keep the movement slow and controlled
- 👉 Keep your gaze looking upward, not downward

Sets:

2–3 sets of 10–15 repetitions

Why is it important?

This exercise improves scapular control and coordination between the shoulder blade and the rotator cuff during overhead movements.

It also helps progressively restore tolerance to functional shoulder movement.

3 CONTROLLED SHOULDER ABDUCTION WITH ECCENTRIC PHASE



What does “eccentric phase” mean?

The eccentric phase is the part of the movement in which the muscle works while lengthening.

In this exercise, the most important part is the slow and controlled lowering of the arm.

- 👉 Do not let the arm drop
- 👉 Slowly control the movement during the lowering phase

This helps improve load tolerance and the functional capacity of the rotator cuff tendons.

Position:

Stand upright with a light dumbbell, or without weight at the beginning.

The arm will move sideways within a comfortable and tolerable range.

Execution:

Slowly raise the arm out to the side as far as comfortably possible.

Then lower the arm even more slowly and in a controlled way over approximately **4–5 seconds**.

- 👉 The lowering phase is the eccentric part of the exercise
 - 👉 Keep the shoulder relaxed
 - 👉 Avoid compensating by leaning the trunk
 - 👉 Avoid shrugging the shoulder toward the ear
-

Sets:

2–3 sets of 10–12 repetitions

Why is it important?

This exercise strengthens the rotator cuff and progressively improves the shoulder tissues' ability to tolerate load.

The eccentric phase allows more specific and controlled tendon loading, which is especially useful in rotator cuff tendinopathy and pain during arm elevation.

4 SHOULDER INTERNAL ROTATION MOBILITY

<https://youtube.com/shorts/4LZUazKR8UI>

Position:

Stand upright using a towel behind your back.

Place the affected arm behind the back, trying to slowly move the hand upward without forcing the movement.

Execution:

Gently assist the movement with the opposite hand by pulling the towel upward.

When you reach a small and tolerable discomfort, perform **3 small gentle pulses** to gain a little extra upward movement.

- 👉 The movement should be slow and tolerable
 - 👉 Do not force the pain
 - 👉 Avoid sudden or aggressive movements
 - 👉 Keep the shoulder relaxed during the exercise
 - 👉 Keep your gaze looking upward, not downward
-

Sets:

2–3 sets of 10–15 repetitions

Why is it important?

Internal shoulder rotation is often limited in people with rotator cuff pain or subacromial sensitivity.

👉 This movement is important during daily activities such as:

- reaching behind the back
- fastening a bra
- dressing
- personal hygiene tasks

Progressively improving this mobility may help restore shoulder function and improve tolerance during everyday activities.

⚠️ Important:

During the early stages, it is not necessary to force this movement.

Mobility should improve gradually and tolerably alongside the overall improvement of the shoulder.

5 POSTERIOR SHOULDER STRETCH



Position:

Bring the affected arm across the chest and assist the movement with the opposite hand.

Execution:

Maintain a gentle and constant stretch without bouncing.

- 👉 Do not force the movement
 - 👉 You should feel a tolerable stretch, not intense pain
-

Sets:

3–4 repetitions of 20–30 seconds

Why is it important?

Helps improve posterior shoulder mobility and may reduce feelings of stiffness and compression during certain shoulder movements.

6 ACTIVE SHOULDER SELF-TRACTION

<https://youtube.com/shorts/Kcd1ETrenGk>

Position:

Stand facing a wall bar, stable bar, fixed radiator, or another firm support positioned approximately at chest height.

Hold the support with both hands.

Place one foot slightly behind the other to create a stable and safe position.

👉 The back leg will act as support and control during the exercise.

Execution:

Slowly lean your body backward while allowing the arms to remain extended and relaxed.

You should feel a slight stretching or unloading sensation in the shoulder.

Then perform small and controlled up-and-down movements with the legs, similar to a mini squat, while respecting the discomfort level.

- 👉 Keep the shoulder relaxed
 - 👉 Keep the neck relaxed
 - 👉 Avoid sudden movements
 - 👉 Do not excessively drop the body backward
 - 👉 The back leg should help control the movement and act as a safety brake if needed
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Sets:

2–3 sets of 8–10 repetitions

Why is it important?

This exercise may help reduce the feeling of shoulder compression and promote gentle unloading of the rotator cuff tissues during movement.

It may also help progressively improve shoulder mobility and tolerance to overhead movements.

👉 The goal is not to force the movement, but to create a comfortable and progressive feeling of mobility and relief during the exercise.

♦ IMPORTANT NOTE

👉 Some more demanding exercises or complex shoulder movements may become useful during later stages, or when carefully introduced in a controlled way.

At this stage, the most important goals are:

- ✅ movement control
- ✅ progressive activation of the rotator cuff
- ✅ proper load management
- ✅ controlled and tolerable movement

👉 Movements such as internal shoulder rotation (for example reaching behind the back or toward the shoulder blade) may feel limited or painful, especially in some individuals.

This is very common, particularly when there is:

- stiffness
- tendon irritation
- subacromial sensitivity
- progressive loss of mobility

👉 For this reason, during the early stages it is not necessary to force these movements.

As pain decreases and the shoulder tolerates load better, it will become possible to progressively work on more complex and functional movements.

👉 It is also important to avoid activities or positions that excessively increase compression and irritation of the shoulder tendons, especially:

- ❌ repetitive overhead movements
- ❌ poorly tolerated loads
- ❌ sudden or forced movements

♦ **FINAL MESSAGE***

If you have reached this point, you have already taken an important step:

👉 **you are starting to actively take care of your shoulder.**

Remember:

- ✅ there is no need to rush
- ✅ there is no need to force the movement
- ✅ the body adapts over time

👉 In most cases, with the right approach, improvement will come.

📈 The most important thing is not for the pain to disappear immediately, but to progressively notice:

- less discomfort
- better mobility
- greater tolerance to movement
- more confidence when using the arm

👉 Consistency and correct exercise execution are key to achieving results.

If you do not notice improvement after approximately one month, it may be useful to undergo a more complete assessment to rule out other shoulder conditions.

👉 In some cases, especially when there is persistent irritation or possible calcifications within the rotator cuff tendons, additional treatments such as shockwave therapy may be helpful.

👉 We recommend consulting a physiotherapist or healthcare professional.

♦ **SUPPORT**

If you have questions or need help:

✉ support@physiocarehub.eu

👉 You do not have to go through this alone.

We are here to help you.

Antonio

