

# Shoulder Impingement Physical Therapy Protocol

## EXERCISE HANDOUT

PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH

REHAB   
My Patient

## SHOULDER IMPINGEMENT PHASE 1

### YOUR REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

This exercise programme has specific exercises to strengthen muscles around your shoulder, upper back and scapula. The exercises will improve your rotator cuff strength and shoulder girdle control as well as stretch and mobilise tight structures. In order to achieve proper rehabilitation of your injury it is important to ensure the exercises are performed with good technique. Poor practice may place potential strain on your shoulder. Before starting each exercise ensure you have good posture - straight upper back with scapula back and down and chin slightly tucked in. The following leaflet includes some exercises to help in your rehabilitation.

### GUIDANCE FOR STRETCHING EXERCISES

Hold all the stretches for 20 seconds each and repeat them five times on each side. It is important to stretch the uninjured muscles so that you are well balanced.

### PROGRESSION SPEED

Your therapist will advise you on the speed you should progress. Progression is not just about being able to do the exercise but to do it correctly with appropriate control. If at any time you feel pain or discomfort stop the exercises and consult your therapist.

### PENDULUM WITH TRACTION

Hold a weight in your hand. Lean over holding on to a chair or table, let your arm hang down by your side, and swing your arm gently in circles. Try to let momentum and gravity move your arm. Go anti-clockwise and clockwise. This exercise is a great way to passively mobilise a stiff shoulder.



SETS

REPS

### ISOMETRIC SHOULDER INTERNAL ROTATION WALL

Stand with your side to a wall or a door frame. Tuck your elbow into your body. Push your arm inwards across your chest, into the wall. Keep your elbow tucked in to your side as you perform the movement. This will cause a contraction of the shoulder muscles. Hold the contraction and relax. Repeat as required.



SETS

REPS

### ISOMETRIC SHOULDER ADDUCTION TOWEL

Stand up and place a large rolled up towel under your arm pit. Bend your elbow to 90 degrees. Gently contract your arm inwards pressing into the towel. This will cause a contraction of the shoulder muscles. Hold the contraction and relax. Repeat as required.



SETS

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### STANDING SCAPULAR STRENGTHENING

Stand up tall with good posture. Place your arms just out from your side, and palms face forwards. Squeeze your shoulder blades together as you draw your arms back. Let your chest and rib cage expand. You should feel a tightening of the muscles at the bottom of your shoulder blades. This exercise will strengthen your lower trapezius muscle and rhomboid muscles, and help with posture.



SETS

REPS

### ISOMETRIC SHOULDER EXTERNAL ROTATION WALL

Stand with your side to a wall or a door frame. Tuck your elbow into your body. Push your arm outwards away from your body into the wall. Keep your elbow tucked in to your side to ensure the movement.



Place your hands on your hips, and put your elbows backwards, and then



Remember not to over-rotate the shoulder

**Shoulder impingement physical therapy protocol** is a crucial aspect of rehabilitation for individuals suffering from shoulder pain and dysfunction. Shoulder impingement occurs when the rotator cuff tendons in the shoulder are compressed during arm movements, leading to pain, inflammation, and decreased range of motion. This condition is commonly seen in athletes, manual laborers, and individuals who perform repetitive overhead motions. The goal of a physical therapy protocol for shoulder impingement is to reduce pain, restore range of motion, strengthen the shoulder muscles, and prevent future injuries. This article outlines a comprehensive shoulder impingement physical therapy protocol, detailing its phases, exercises, and best practices for recovery.

## Understanding Shoulder Impingement

Shoulder impingement syndrome typically manifests as pain and discomfort in the shoulder, especially during overhead activities. It can result from various factors, including:

- Rotator cuff tendonitis
- Subacromial bursitis
- Structural abnormalities in the shoulder joint
- Poor posture or muscle imbalances

Symptoms of shoulder impingement may include:

- Pain when lifting the arm
- Weakness in the shoulder muscles
- Limited range of motion
- Pain at night, especially when lying on the affected side

Understanding these symptoms is essential for implementing an effective physical therapy protocol.

## **Phases of Shoulder Impingement Rehabilitation**

The rehabilitation process for shoulder impingement can be divided into three main phases:

### **Phase 1: Pain Relief and Inflammation Control**

The initial phase focuses on reducing pain and inflammation. This is crucial in allowing the patient to engage in rehabilitation exercises without exacerbating their condition. Key components of this phase include:

- Rest: Avoiding activities that provoke pain, especially overhead movements.
- Ice Therapy: Applying ice packs to the shoulder for 15-20 minutes several times a day to reduce swelling and relieve pain.
- Medication: Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, may be recommended to manage pain and inflammation.
- Gentle Range of Motion Exercises: Initiating passive and assisted range of motion exercises can help maintain mobility without stressing the shoulder.

Example exercises to include in this phase:

1. Pendulum swings: Lean forward and let the affected arm hang down, gently swinging it in small circles.
2. Table slides: Sit at a table and slide the affected arm forward on the surface while keeping it relaxed.

### **Phase 2: Strengthening and Stabilization**

Once pain and inflammation are under control, the focus shifts to restoring strength and stability in the shoulder. This phase aims to strengthen the rotator cuff and scapular

muscles while improving overall shoulder mechanics.

Key components of this phase include:

- **Strengthening Exercises:** Gradually introducing resistance exercises targeting the shoulder muscles.
- **Scapular Stabilization:** Focusing on exercises that enhance the stability and movement of the shoulder blade.

Example exercises for this phase:

1. **Isometric shoulder exercises:** Press the arm against a wall without moving it to engage the muscles.
2. **External rotation with resistance band:** Attach a resistance band to a stable object, hold the band with the affected arm, and rotate the arm outward from the body.
3. **Scapular retraction:** Sit or stand with a straight back and squeeze the shoulder blades together.

## **Phase 3: Functional Training and Return to Activity**

The final phase of rehabilitation focuses on restoring functional movement and preparing the individual to return to their regular activities, including sports or work-related tasks.

Key components of this phase include:

- **Sport-Specific Drills:** Incorporating exercises that mimic the movements involved in the individual's specific activities.
- **Progressive Loading:** Gradually increasing the intensity and complexity of exercises to improve performance.

Example exercises for this phase:

1. **Overhead press:** Using light weights, perform overhead presses to strengthen the shoulder in functional movement patterns.
2. **Dumbbell rows:** Strengthen the upper back and shoulder stabilizers while promoting proper posture.
3. **Plyometric exercises:** Introduce activities like medicine ball throws or wall tosses to enhance power and coordination.

## **General Guidelines for Shoulder Impingement Physical Therapy**

When implementing a physical therapy protocol for shoulder impingement, the following guidelines should be considered:

- **Consultation with a Physical Therapist:** Always seek professional guidance to develop a

personalized rehabilitation plan.

- Individualized Approach: Tailor exercises based on the individual's specific needs, pain levels, and functional goals.
- Monitor Progress: Regularly assess the effectiveness of the rehabilitation program and adjust it as necessary.
- Emphasize Posture: Educate the patient on the importance of maintaining good posture during daily activities to prevent recurrence.
- Incorporate Stretching: Include stretching exercises for the shoulder and surrounding muscles to enhance flexibility and range of motion.

## **Preventing Shoulder Impingement Recurrence**

Once rehabilitation is complete, individuals should focus on strategies to prevent future episodes of shoulder impingement. Some preventative measures include:

- Maintaining Strength: Continue with a regular strength training program targeting the shoulder and upper back muscles.
- Regular Stretching: Incorporate flexibility exercises to maintain a full range of motion in the shoulder joint.
- Ergonomic Adjustments: Make necessary modifications to workstations and activity techniques to minimize shoulder strain.
- Gradual Return to Activities: Avoid rushing back into high-impact sports or repetitive overhead tasks without adequate preparation.

## **Conclusion**

Shoulder impingement physical therapy protocol is a structured approach to alleviating pain, restoring mobility, and strengthening the shoulder. By following the outlined phases of rehabilitation—focusing on pain relief, strengthening, and functional training—individuals can effectively recover from shoulder impingement and reduce the risk of future injuries. It is essential to work closely with a qualified physical therapist throughout the rehabilitation process to ensure a safe and effective return to normal activities. With dedication, patience, and proper guidance, individuals can regain their shoulder function and enjoy an active lifestyle free from pain.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is shoulder impingement, and how does it affect physical therapy protocols?**

Shoulder impingement occurs when the shoulder's rotator cuff tendons become irritated or inflamed as they pass through the shoulder joint. This condition affects physical therapy protocols by necessitating a focus on reducing inflammation, improving range of motion, and strengthening the surrounding muscles.

## **What are the initial steps in a shoulder impingement physical therapy protocol?**

The initial steps typically include rest, ice application to reduce inflammation, and gentle range-of-motion exercises. The goal is to minimize pain and restore mobility before progressing to strengthening exercises.

## **What types of exercises are commonly included in a shoulder impingement physical therapy protocol?**

Common exercises include pendulum swings, wall slides, rotator cuff strengthening exercises, and scapular stabilization exercises. These aim to enhance shoulder mobility and strength while avoiding exacerbation of symptoms.

## **How long does a typical shoulder impingement physical therapy protocol last?**

A typical shoulder impingement physical therapy protocol may last anywhere from 4 to 12 weeks, depending on the severity of the condition and the patient's response to treatment. Regular assessments help guide the duration.

## **What role does manual therapy play in shoulder impingement treatment?**

Manual therapy can play a significant role in shoulder impingement treatment by helping to improve joint mobility, reduce pain, and enhance the effectiveness of exercise therapy. Techniques may include joint mobilizations and soft tissue manipulation.

## **When should a patient with shoulder impingement consider surgical intervention after physical therapy?**

If a patient does not experience significant improvement after an appropriate course of physical therapy (usually 3 to 6 months), or if they have severe pain and functional limitations, surgical intervention may be considered to relieve impingement.

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"Discover how a shoulder impingement physical therapy protocol can alleviate pain and improve mobility. Learn more about effective treatments and exercises!"

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