

# Shoulder Sprain

A shoulder sprain happens when you stretch or tear tough bands of tissue (called ligaments) and/or muscles that help you use your shoulder.



## What to Expect

Symptoms of a shoulder sprain include:

- Pain in your shoulder, which may worsen when moving your arm.
- Stiffness and difficulty moving your shoulder.
- Swelling, bruising, or tenderness around your shoulder.
- Feeling that your shoulder is unstable or weak.

With rest and care, these symptoms are expected to improve gradually over a few days. The time needed for full recovery depends on how severe your injury is and could range from a couple weeks to a few months.



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### Recommended Follow-Up

- Follow up in \_\_ days.

Name of Provider

Reason

Date/Time

Location

Contact Info

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



## When to Get Help

**Go to the nearest Emergency Department or Urgent Care Centre if:**

- You have severe pain or swelling that does not improve with rest and medication.
- You have significant weakness or inability to move your shoulder.
- You develop numbness or tingling in your arm or hand.
- Your arm becomes cool or pale.

**See your health care provider, go to a walk-in clinic or call 811 (711 for the hearing impaired) if you:**

- You have trouble managing your pain or swelling.
- Your symptoms do not improve with time as expected.
- You have concerns about your recovery or the healing process.

The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team. This information does not replace the advice given to you by your health care provider.

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**EMERGENCY CARE BC**  
Provincial Health Services Authority

[EmergencyCareBC.ca](https://www.emergencycarebc.ca)

**To Learn More Ask:**

- Your health care provider.

HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca)



## How to Care for Yourself at Home

### **Rest and Activity**



#### REST

For the first 1-2 weeks after your injury, rest and protect your shoulder. Avoid or reduce any activity that worsens your pain such as lifting heavy objects or intense exercise. It is important not to keep your shoulder completely still for long periods of time, as this may lead to stiffness and a longer recovery.

#### GENTLE MOVEMENT

Begin doing gentle shoulder movements to maintain flexibility as soon as you are able. These movements should not cause significant pain.

#### RETURNING TO ACTIVITY

Begin with only light activities that do not strain your shoulder and continue with day-to-day activities as your pain allows. Gradually increase your activity as your pain gets better.

#### SUPPORT AND SLINGS

Your doctor may have recommended that you use a sling for the first few days.

- If possible, try to spend some time not using your sling each day.
- As your pain improves, decrease how often you use your sling. Using a sling for too long or too much can lead to stiffness.

### **Follow-Up**

- After your pain has started to settle down, you may want to see a physiotherapist who may give you exercises to do at home.

## Shoulder Sprain Discharge Instructions - continued

- You can schedule an appointment with your family doctor a few weeks after your injury to assess your healing progress.

### **Pain Control**

- Place a cold pack on your shoulder for 20 minutes every 1-2 hours for the first few days to help with swelling and pain. Wrap the cold pack in a thin cloth to avoid direct contact with your skin.
- After 2-3 days, start using a warm compress or heating pad.
- You can also use the medications listed below.

### **Medication**

- If you have been told to take medications, follow the instructions carefully. Check the bottle of the medication you have purchased for instructions.



#### **IBUPROFEN (E.G., ADVIL®, MOTRIN®)**

- 200-400 mg every 6-8 hours as needed while awake, taken with small snack (max: 1200mg/day).
- Avoid taking this medication for longer than 5-7 days. See your primary care provider if you need to use this for longer.
- Avoid this medication if you are >65 years old, pregnant, or have the following conditions: severe liver or kidney disease, peptic ulcer disease, or heart failure. Speak to your primary care provider before taking this if you have a history of stroke, GERD, inflammatory bowel disease, liver cirrhosis, or ischemic vascular disease.

#### **ACETAMINOPHEN (E.G., TYLENOL®)**

- 500-1000 mg every 4-6 hours as needed while awake, with water (max: 4000mg/day).

If you have liver disease or drink over 3 alcoholic beverages per day:

- Maximum dose: 3000mg per day.
- Do not use this medicine for longer than 5-7 days. Speak to your primary care provider if you need to use this for longer.

Be careful not to exceed the maximum dose when taking this medication with other medication that contain acetaminophen (e.g., Dayquil/Nyquil®).

Find this information sheet on the ECBC website:

[https://emergencycarebc.ca/clinical\\_resource/patient-information-sheet/shoulder-sprain/](https://emergencycarebc.ca/clinical_resource/patient-information-sheet/shoulder-sprain/)

### **Notes:**

#### **Additional Information**

- Gentle Arm Movement Exercises:**  
<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/recovery/rotator-cuff-and-shoulder-conditioning-program/>

#### **Tell Us What You Think!**

Have feedback about this document? Use the form at: [bit.ly/pdsfeedback](http://bit.ly/pdsfeedback)



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