Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Physiotherapy Service

Shoulder pain.

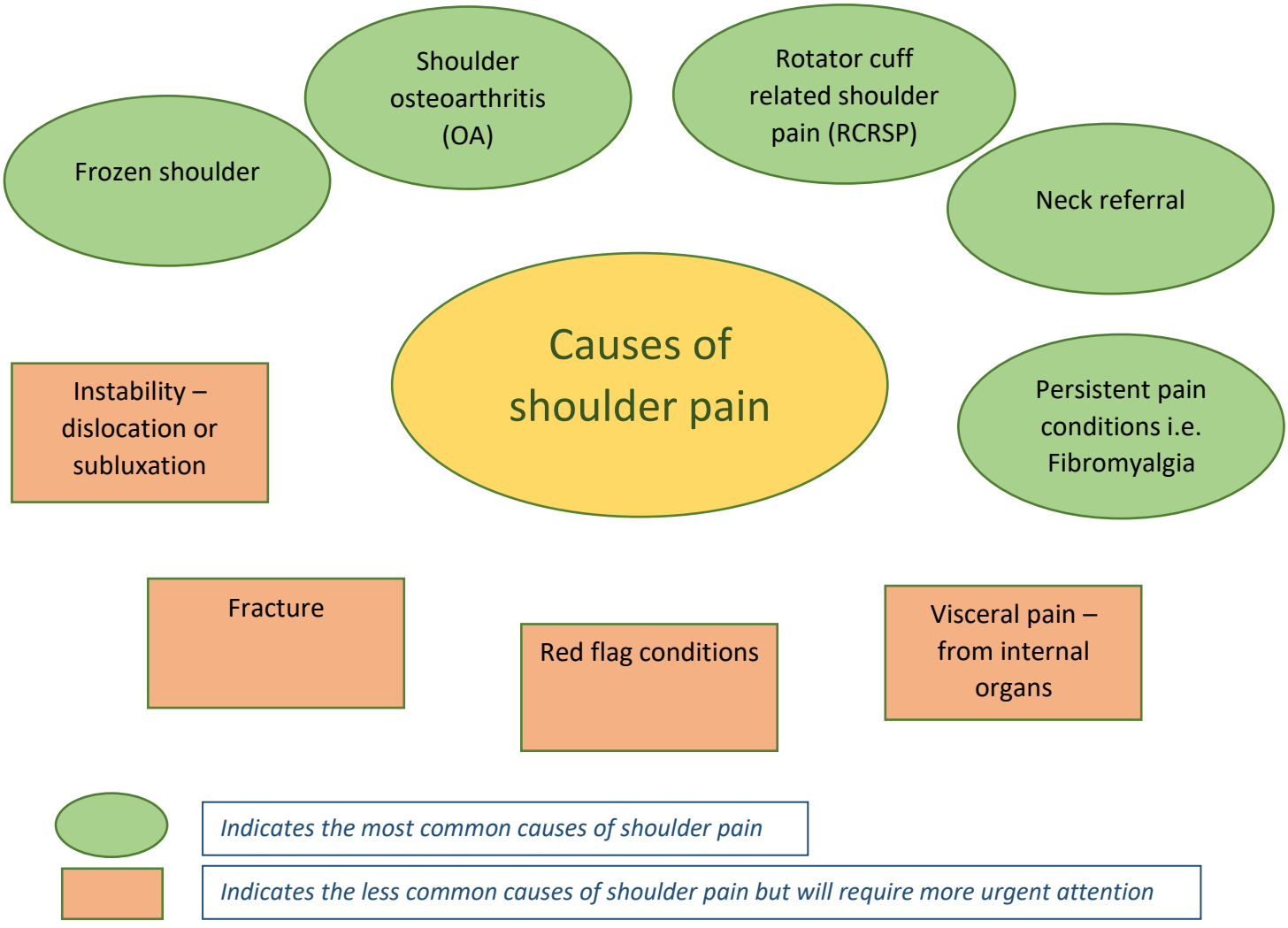
Causes and when to seek help.

SCAN ME

Shoulder pain

Pain in the shoulder can arise from many different sources. Shoulder pain is the third most common musculoskeletal condition that patients present to their GP or Physiotherapist with. Acute shoulder pain will usually settle over a short period, but should it persist you should consultant with your GP or a Physiotherapist so they can assess your symptoms and diagnose the source of your pain.

Listed below are some examples of conditions that may cause shoulder pain:



When should you seek advice from a medical professional for your shoulder pain?

<u>Emergency medical assistance – attend your emergency department:</u>

If your shoulder pain is accompanied with breathing difficulty and pain/tightness in your chest - this may be a symptom of a heart attack.

If your shoulder pain is caused by an injury such as a fall and is accompanied by joint deformity, intense pain, swelling and difficulty in moving your arm – this may indicate a fracture or dislocation.

If your shoulder pain is associated with symptoms of swelling having had no trauma and if there is heat, redness, tenderness, generally feeling unwell, fever and tiredness – this could indicate the presence of an infection.

<u>Make an appointment with your Doctor or Physiotherapist if you:</u>

Have a previous history of cancer.

Are unable to sleep due to pain.

Have unexplained weight loss or gain.

Suffer from night sweats.

Have new respiratory symptoms such as a persistent cough, recurrent chest infections, coughing up blood.

Have pins & needles and /or numbness in your upper limb.

Are suddenly unable to lift your arm and have weakness in your upper limb.

Have unexplained muscle wasting around your shoulder and shoulder blade.

Have recurrent episodes of instability or subluxation of your shoulder joint.

Have multiple joints with pain, stiffness or swelling.

Have shoulder pain associated with abdominal pain, vomiting or shoulder pain affected by your diet.

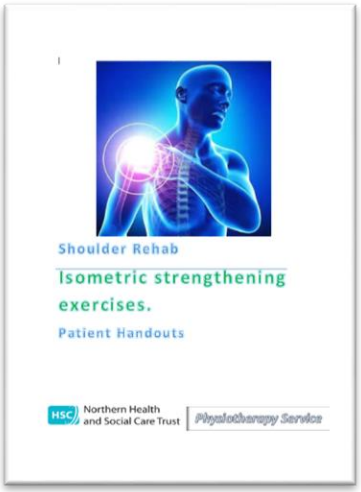
If your pain fails to settle over a few weeks following a period of self-care such as:

- Taking over-the-counter pain medications (you should ask your pharmacist for advice).
- Following a period of relative rest from aggravating factors.
- Using ice on your painful shoulder for 15 to 20 minutes a few times each day.

Managing your shoulder pain.

How your shoulder pain is managed may vary slightly depending on what the source of your symptoms are. For the most common shoulder conditions you are generally encouraged to follow the self-care methods discussed previously. You are also encouraged to keep

active and move your shoulder regularly within tolerable levels of discomfort to prevent deterioration in your range of movement, strength and function. If your symptoms fail to settle and your Doctor has screened you for the less common causes of shoulder pain, you will be referred to physiotherapy for an assessment and commenced on a rehab programme. Scan the QR code with your phone to visit our website which has further information on shoulder pain and exercise.



Useful resources:

SCAN ME

Physiotherapy Service (MSK Outpatient Service) | Northern Health and Social Care Trust (hscni.net)

Shoulder pain - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

Shoulder pain | Health topics A to Z | CKS | NICE

The information in this booklet is for guidance only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice from a registered Physiotherapist.

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