

Not all shoulder injuries are rotator cuff related
Joseph H. Nowak, PT, DPT
Physical Therapist/Co-Owner
Gaston Rehab Associates, Inc.

Have you ever woken up in the morning, and went to reach for your coffee cup high in your cupboard and not be able to because your shoulder hurt? Are you finding it difficult to tuck in your shirt behind your back because of pain in your arm? When most people have this problem, they assume it's their rotator cuff that is causing their discomfort. If you are able to lift your arm, but you can't get it as high as you normally can, more than likely you have adhesive capsulitis.

Adhesive capsulitis, or as it's commonly called, frozen shoulder, is when the capsule surrounding the shoulder joint becomes stiff and inflamed. Your shoulder loses its normal ability to move in all directions, and will cause pain & discomfort when you do try to move it.

Frozen shoulders can occur after an injury to your shoulder. If you stop moving your shoulder because it hurts due to an injury, your body will tighten down the capsule around your shoulder because you're not moving it as much. Also, histological changes can occur in the capsule (different than the changes produced by immobilization) that will cause the shoulder to "freeze".

If you feel that you have a frozen shoulder, the best thing to do is keep it moving in a pain-free range. The only discomfort you should feel is a stretch. You do not want pain going down the side of your arm. A good example of an exercise to do is "wall walking". Stand next to a wall and place your hand on the wall. Gently slide your hand or walk your fingers up the wall as far as you can without it hurting. Hold for 5 seconds, then return back to the start position.

A licensed physical therapist can help to determine the cause of your shoulder pain. If you do indeed have a frozen shoulder, the therapist can establish a good home exercise program to assist in regaining the motion of your shoulder.