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Exercises for Impingement

Cortisone is extremely useful to reduce the pain of impingement by working as a strong local anti-inflammatory when it is injected above the rotator cuff tendon. However, the cortisone alone will not cure impingement. It simply provides a window of opportunity for you to undertake an exercise programme relatively pain free. It is the exercises that will hopefully effect a cure.

You will be referred to a physiotherapist who will supervise your exercise programme. However, it is critical that you undertake the exercises using theraband at home at least twice per day. I recommend 3 sets of 15 repetitions of each exercise. If the theraband is so difficult that you can only do 4 or 5 repeats you need to decrease the stretch on the theraband or ask your therapist for an easier colour. Conversely if you can do 40 or 50 repeats there is not enough stretch on the theraband or you need a more difficult colour.

The exercises are very simple and are designed to strengthen two important muscles. These are subscapularis and infraspinatus. These are the two cuff muscles that have a downward pull on the head of the humerus (the ball of the shoulder joint). By strengthening these we hope to keep the golf ball in the middle of the golf tee and avoid pressure on the rotator cuff tendons above.

Infraspinatus exercise

Attach your theraband to a door handle and stand side on with your painful shoulder furthest from the door knob. Tuck a magazine between your elbow and your side. Grasp the theraband in your hand with your elbow at 90°. By rotating your hand away from your body you will stretch the theraband. Do a set of 15, have a short rest and repeat 2 more sets.

Alternatively we will give you a yellow or green "mini-band". This is a 50cm latex loop. Loop it over both wrists. Elbows locked at your side. Now rotate the forearm of the sore shoulder outwards. The advantage is you can do this exercise sitting watching TV or reading a book. Hopefully by avoiding boredom you will do it for longer. It is the single most effective exercise.

Subscapularis exercise

The magazine is no longer needed. Stand face on to the door knob. Hold the theraband in your hand with your hand near your tummy button. Keep your wrist straight and bring your elbow as far forward as you are comfortable doing. Press your hand firmly to your tummy but do not let your wrist bend or your elbow drop towards your side. Do a set of 15, have a short rest and repeat for 2 more sets.

Posterior capsule stretch

It is very common to have a tight shoulder joint around the back by your shoulder blade. This stretch is very simple. Hold your arm straight out in front of you as if firing a pistol. Grab your elbow with your good arm and pull your elbow towards your good shoulder. You will feel the tightness at the back of your shoulder. A long steady stretch of 1-2 minutes is much more effective than sudden jerky movements. Repeat this before and after each exercise session.

I like to see a significant improvement in the first 4 to 6 weeks of undertaking this programme. I will generally see you back about 6 weeks after beginning this programme. Generally the cortisone can be repeated 1 more time but beyond that arthroscopic surgery is sometimes the best option.

Once the shoulder is pain free it is still important to maintain these exercises 2 or 3 times a week for up to a year for avoid a relapse of the impingement pain.