



What is shoulder osteoarthritis?

Shoulder (Glenohumeral) osteoarthritis occurs when the protective bony covering (cartilage) becomes damaged. Over time the cartilage is worn away and the underlying bone is gradually exposed, resulting in pain and stiffness as the ends rub together.

What are the possible causes?

Osteoarthritis is less common in the shoulder and there are many possible causes, such as:

- Previous fractures/trauma around the shoulder
- Damage to the rotator cuff muscles surrounding the shoulder
- Inflammatory conditions such as Rheumatoid arthritis
- Repetitive occupational or sporting use.

What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms include:

- Pain around the shoulder and upper arm, sometimes at night
- Limitation in movement
- Noises and catching sensations in the shoulder during movement.

How is it diagnosed?

- Your healthcare professional will ask you questions and examine your shoulders
- X-rays are taken to look for signs of arthritis (picture above).

What are the treatment options?

In the majority of cases, shoulder joint osteoarthritis can be managed **without surgery**.

Non-operative treatment:

- **Physiotherapy** to improve movement and limit stiffness
- **Regular painkillers** should be used to allow function and for activities
- **Injections** can provide some relief, but the benefit varies between people and they cannot be given long term as they eventually damage the shoulder tendons.
- **Self help strategies**, see below

Surgical management:

- **Shoulder Replacement** is offered to individuals who have significant pain and have failed to respond to the treatments above. The surgeon will select the most appropriate one for you.
- **Keyhole surgery** is not helpful in the treatment of shoulder arthritis.

What can I do to help?

- **Maintaining healthy lifestyle habits:** Dealing with other contributing factors such as stress, smoking, alcohol intake, sleep and cardiovascular health can help. More information can be found at www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living.
- **Maintain movement** of the shoulder joint
- It is important to **keep active** to maintain good muscle strength and flexibility
- **Pacing and spacing** activity and avoiding repetitive overhead activity
- **Rest only when joints are painful** as maintaining movement is important.

Useful phone numbers

NHS Lothian switchboard: 0131 536 1000