

Numerous patients come through our clinic reporting the inability to move their shoulder through the full motion due to pain and stiffness. The typical patient comes in stating they are unable to reach the seat belt, reach behind their back, and have difficulty reaching into cabinets. These are classic signs of a frozen shoulder.

The full name for a frozen shoulder is **adhesive capsulitis**. While a frozen shoulder commonly has an insidious onset, there is a higher incidence rate with people who have diabetes, thyroid problems, middle aged and female, and have sustained a shoulder injury. During a frozen shoulder the tissue surrounding the joint becomes thickened and contracts resulting in restricted mobility. The shoulder joint is a ball and socket joint. The ball (humerus bone) has to rotate in a well lubricated socket (scapula bone) to reach the arm into varying positions. During a frozen shoulder the tissue between the humerus and scapula becomes thickened restricting the rotation of the ball in the socket.

A frozen shoulder generally has three stages which include the freezing, frozen, and thawing stage. Think of an ice cube. The motion becomes stiff as it is freezing, complete stiffness in the frozen stage, and the movement begins to return in the thawing stage. To ensure the fastest recovery possible to progress through the stages, it is important to keep the shoulder moving. The intensity of the stretching will increase through the stages as pain becomes less and there is a great tolerance to movement. Globally I like the exercises from **Harvard Health** for a frozen shoulder. These include range of motion exercises to regain mobility that is lost in the shoulder while also looking to regain strength lost from muscle atrophy from underuse. Though these exercises are great as a general plan, a physical therapist can guide you through exercises that fit your deficits and the stage of recovery you are in. I would recommend receiving treatment sooner rather than later by a physical therapist to help guide you through exercises to help guide recovery as well as hands on techniques which can help loosen the restrictions in the shoulder.

Harvard Health: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/shoulders/stretching-exercises-frozen-shoulder>



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