

Subacromial Shoulder Pain

—
Patient information leaflet



Primary Care MSK
Delivering MSK Training to Primary Care

Page of Contents

1 *What is subacromial Shoulder Pain?*

2 *Why does it happen?*

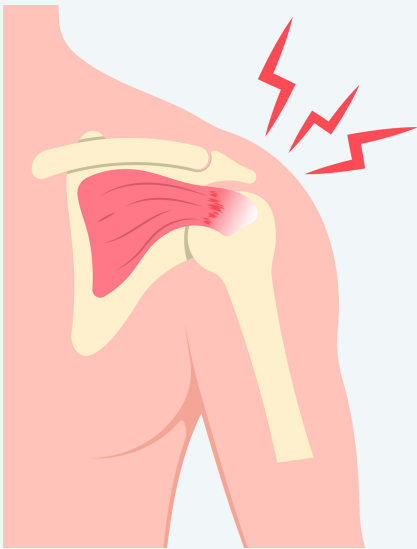
3 *Do I need a scan?*

4 *How Can I Get Better?*

What is Subacromial Shoulder Pain?

Subacromial Shoulder Pain

(sometimes called Shoulder Impingement or Rotator Cuff-Related Pain) happens when the Rotator Cuff or Bursa in the shoulder become irritated.



Your rotator cuff, a group of four muscles, play a big role in stabilising your shoulder and helping you lift or rotate your arm. If their tendons get overworked or irritated, it can lead to pain, especially when you're reaching overhead, putting on a jacket, or lying on that side in bed.

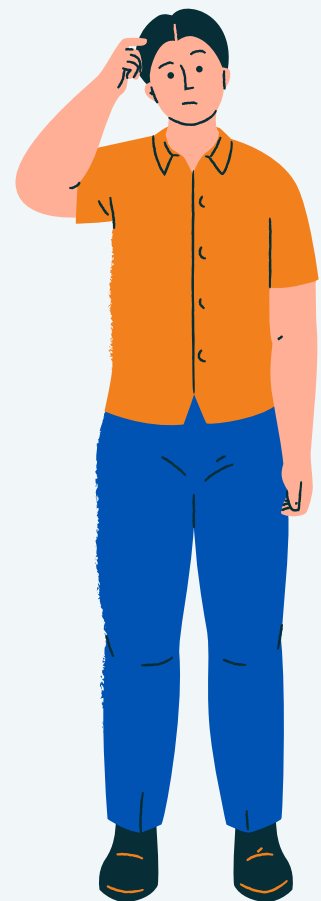
This might sound worrying, but don't panic! **Subacromial shoulder pain is common and can be managed effectively with the right approach.**

Why Does Subacromial Shoulder Pain Happen?

Subacromial Shoulder Pain can feel like it comes out of nowhere, but there are a few things that might be contributing:

- **Repetitive activities:** Overhead movements, lifting, or certain sports can put extra strain on your shoulder.
- **Lifestyle factors:** Smoking, alcohol, and even your diet can affect how your body handles pain and heals.
- **Natural age-related changes:** As we age, our tendons and joints go through normal changes that can make them more prone to irritation.
- **Stress and anxiety:** These can increase how sensitive your body is to pain, making it feel worse.

It's rarely down to one thing—it's usually a mix of factors. The good news is that you can take steps to feel better.



Do I Need a Scan?

Probably not. Many people think a scan will “show what’s wrong,” but that’s not always true.

Studies tell us that scans like **MRIs, Ultrasounds and X-rays often show similar changes in people with and without shoulder pain.**

For example, in a 2019 study, up to 85% of people with pain in one shoulder, had the same “abnormal” findings on their non-painful side.

Scans can’t show pain, and they don’t always help us understand your symptoms.

Your clinician can diagnose subacromial pain based on your story and a physical assessment.

If you’ve got questions about scans, don’t hesitate to ask your clinician—they’ll explain why it might not be needed in your case.



How Can I Get Better?

Most people recover well with simple, consistent steps.

1. **Do Your Rehab Exercises**

Exercise is the best way to strengthen your shoulder and get back to your usual activities. If your clinician gave you a program, stick to it within comfort levels.

2. **Modify your activities** to prevent frequent irritation. Do not push through pain, as this will not speed up recovery.

3. **Check Your Lifestyle**

- Smoking and alcohol: Cutting back can help your body heal.
- Stay active: Keeping your body moving overall can support recovery.

4. **Be Patient**

Recovery takes time, **usually around 6-12 weeks** with a structured exercise plan. It might feel slow at first, but small improvements add up!

If your symptoms are not improving after 6 to 12 weeks, you should discuss this with your healthcare clinician.

Subacromial Shoulder Pain

- Common shoulder condition that can be managed effectively with the correct approach
- Multiple factors can increase the risk of developing this condition including overuse and lifestyle habits
- Scans are rarely needed
- A good rehab plan is key to return to full fitness



@primarycaremsk



@primarycaremsk



@PrimaryCareMSK



Primary Care MSK



© Primary Care MSK Ltd. 2025



Primary Care MSK
Delivering MSK Training to Primary Care