

Shoulder Dislocation and Instability

What is it?

A shoulder dislocation is when the upper arm bone comes out of the shoulder blade socket. It can be very painful. It is often caused by falls or sport and high impact injuries. If your shoulder is out of its socket, you won't be able to move it. You may notice swelling, bruising or pain. Your shoulder may look out of place or deformed. If the bone and tissues around the shoulder joint are damaged when it comes out of its socket, it can become unstable. This means it's more likely to come out of its socket again in the future.

What questions could I ask my doctor?

- ☐ *When can I exercise again?*
- ☐ *What movements should I avoid?*
- ☐ *Do I need surgery?*



What will my GP do now?

If your dislocation is not severe, your GP may ease your shoulder back into place. They may send you for scans (an X-ray or MRI). They may also refer you to the hospital for treatment if the dislocation is more complex. Severe shoulder dislocations may need surgery.

Your GP may give you gentle movements to help get the joint moving like normal again. If you have an unstable shoulder, your GP may refer you to a surgeon to see if surgery is right for you. They may also refer you to a physiotherapist who will help you strengthen the muscles in and around your shoulder.

What will my GP do in the future?

If your shoulder does not improve, your GP may refer you to a specialist called a physiotherapist or a surgeon.

What can I do?

While your shoulder heals, you'll need to wear a sling for two-to-three weeks. While your arm is in the sling, do gentle movements of your elbow, wrist, and hand as advised by your GP. Once your arm is out of the sling, gently move the joint as advised by your GP. Don't return to sport for at least twelve weeks, or until your shoulder is back to its normal strength.

If your shoulder joint is unstable, only move your arm to shoulder height. Avoid reaching over your head or doing a throwing action. You should also avoid any movement which causes you pain. Use a sling to rest your arm and keep using gentle movements as advised by your GP.

What supports are available?

Your GP will provide you with the details of a physiotherapist or a private orthopaedic surgeon if needed.

Where can I learn more?

- **Orthoinfo** – Chronic shoulder instability and dislocation: orthoinfo.aaos.org