

Scapula (Shoulder Blade) Injuries: A Guide for Patients

This leaflet is for anybody who has sustained injuries to their scapula. It tells you about symptoms you may experience while you recover, how to prevent complications and how you can aid your recovery. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is a scapula injury?

Injuries to the scapula include fractures, severe bruising and/or possible tendon injuries. This generally occurs following a high impact trauma such as falling from a height, a road traffic accident, cycling accident or high impact sports.

Symptoms

Scapula injuries can be very painful but you can expect this discomfort to improve over a period of three to six weeks, the more severe the injury the longer it may take to subside. You may have swelling or bruising and may have difficulty moving the affected arm. You may also notice, with some more severe injuries, a difference in how your injured scapula looks compared to your uninjured side. This may improve in time, but possibly will not return to its original shape.

Treatment

Scapula injuries are managed differently depending on the severity. Surgery to fix a broken scapula is rare and for most the injury heals on its own over a period of weeks with the use of a sling and gentle exercises / movement.

Possible complications

Complications of a clavicle injury may include tearing of the muscles, ligaments and tendons, or damage to the nerves or blood vessels around your shoulder. You may have a stiff and painful shoulder for some time after the injury and the affected arm may become weak from disuse.

What can I do to help my recovery?

During your admission to St. George's Hospital you will be provided with advice and guided on appropriate exercises. You should complete the exercises daily to help restore full range of movement. Your Physiotherapist/Occupational Therapist will provide advice on managing daily activities as you might need to temporarily modify these. Ensure your pain is well-controlled by taking regular painkillers.

Do a steady amount of activity every day and gradually increase this until you have returned to your usual activities; avoid spending prolonged periods of time in bed as this is not thought to help recovery.

What happens after I have left hospital?

You will have a follow up in Fracture clinic arranged by the orthopaedic doctors, usually at two to six weeks after your discharge from hospital.

You may have been provided an exercise sheet by your ward physiotherapist, if so you should complete these exercises on a daily basis until you are satisfied with your movement.

Do I need follow- up physiotherapy?

If you have not been referred to physiotherapy on discharge from hospital but are still finding activities difficult you may need a referral to outpatient physiotherapy. This can be done via Fracture clinic or your GP.

You should also contact your GP if you:

- a) Notice any sudden increase in pain not resolved with your painkillers
- b) Experience continuing pain that persists for more than six to eight weeks
- c) Notice any sudden changes in power and sensation in your arm
- d) Experience difficulty with progression of your movement
- e) If you are experiencing difficulties with managing your daily tasks at home (for example washing and dressing, shopping, cooking and eating).

Contact Us

You can contact your ward via St. George's Hospital switchboard for any nursing or medical queries: **020 8672 1255**.

Trauma, Orthopaedics & Plastics Therapy Department,
5th Floor St. James' Wing, St. George's Hospital. Tel: **020 8725 0985**

Web: <https://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/service/therapies/trauma-and-orthopaedics-2/>

Twitter: @StGTraumaPTOT

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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