

Dislocated Shoulder

Patient Information

Orthopaedic Clinic, Wellington and Kenepuru Hospitals

The shoulder is the most mobile joint in the body. It is also the most commonly dislocated joint as the socket is small. A dislocated shoulder occurs most often in males because of their involvement in contact sport, such as rugby. First time dislocation often occurs following a direct or heavy blow. However, if the joint becomes unstable, minor activity may result in dislocation. This is a very painful injury, which requires urgent support and treatment.

Diagnosis is made following an examination of the shoulder, history of how the injury occurred, and an x-ray.

Treatment

The shoulder joint will be reduced using pain relieving and muscle relaxing medication. Once the shoulder is back in the joint another x-ray will be taken to confirm it is in the correct position. Your arm will then be supported in a special sling to prevent movement. The sling needs to be used for a period of 1-2 weeks. The time will depend on your age and whether this is the first time your shoulder has dislocated.

Pain relief

Usually pain subsides once the shoulder joint has relocated. However, if you continue to have pain you should take pain medication frequently and correctly to help control your pain. We recommended that adults take a combination of:

- Paracetamol (Panadol) for pain and fever. 1 gram (2 tablets) every 4-6 hours. Do not exceed more than 4 grams (8 tablets) over a 24 hour period
- An anti-inflammatory medicine such as voltaren or neurofen morning and night time to reduce swelling

Please tell us if you are allergic to any medications or have any reason not to take these medications. A prescription should be provided for you to obtain pain relief medication. You can also buy the medicines from your local Pharmacy without a prescription.

Exercises

You should not exercise your arm until instructed to do so by the doctor. It is very important that you do **NOT** lift your arm above your shoulder or reach behind you.

Activities which increase the risk of re dislocation include brushing or washing your hair, doing up bra straps, and scratching your back.

Your sling should only be removed for showering. You should not use this arm in the shower. To wash under your arm, lean forward and let your arm hang. This way you will be able to wash without discomfort.

Dressing & Undressing

Dressing and undressing can be painful, and increase the risk of re dislocation. To minimise this, here are some tips:

When putting your shirt on:

- put the arm of the affected shoulder into the sleeve of your shirt
- put your head through the neck
- put the unaffected arm through the sleeve last

To remove your shirt:

- take the unaffected arm through the sleeve last
- lift the shirt over your head and clear
- you will then be able to slide the shirt down the injured side without difficulty

You must not raise the affected arm to put through a sleeve.

Work and Sporting Activity

When you return to work will depend upon the type of work you do. If it involves manual activity, or lifting, it will take several weeks, however, if you have an office job, you may not need time off.

You should not consider returning to sporting activity until instructed to do so, particularly sports which involve use of the upper body.

Contact sport such as rugby should be avoided for at least 6-8 weeks.

Outlook/Follow Up

You will be given an initial appointment to be reassessed 1-3 weeks following your injury. Whether you require additional appointments will depend upon your progress. Physiotherapy is often required to strengthen the shoulder, and reduce the possibility of further dislocation.

You may experience numbness over the 'badge' area of your upper arm. If this occurs you should discuss it with the doctor in charge of your care.

When should I seek help?

Phone immediately (Wellington Orthopaedic clinic / Kenepuru Outpatients during clinic hours or Emergency Dept if after hours) **if you:**

- Develop numbness or tingling in your arm or hand
- Cannot move your arm or wrist
- Have severe or increasing pain which is not helped with your pain relief medication

Follow-up appointments

It is important that you return for your follow-up appointments. You will be given an Orthopaedic clinic appointment when you are reviewed. This may be followed up with several appointments before you are discharged from the clinic.

Contact details

Remember If you do not have an appointment, always phone before coming to Orthopaedic clinic.

Wellington Hospital Orthopaedic Clinic

Phone (04) 385 5952 Fax (04) 385 5953

Hours of opening: Monday – Friday (including Public Holidays) 8am -9.30pm.

Sat & Sunday 9am -5.30pm

Outside of these hours please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

Kenepuru Hospital Outpatients

Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 7205

Hours of opening: Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 4.30pm.

Outside of these hours please contact the Wellington Orthopaedic Clinic on (04) 385 5954. If they are closed contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department on (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

Can't keep your outpatient appointment?

Please phone us on 0800 999 442 and let us know as soon as possible.