Regaining Natural Shoulder Movement

There are 6 movements you need to train in order to regain strength, flexibility and function in your shoulder. They are:

1. Lifting forwards (flexion)
2. Pushing arm backwards (extension)
3. Moving arm outwards (abduction)
4. Pulling arm across body (adduction)
5. Rotating inwards
6. Rotating outwards

First, we’ll go through a series of exercises to work on flexibility and range of motion within the shoulder. Then, we’ll look at a range of exercises to strengthen the shoulder and the shoulder stabiliser muscles.

**Hanging Shoulder**

This first exercise works for any shoulder problem. You drop your arm forward, and drop your whole body forward, so your arm is just hanging.

What’s happening now is that there’s space created in the joint. You’re allowing gravity to work, and the head of the humerus is just hanging in the joint. When you’ve had a painful shoulder, a lot of your movements have become tense, abnormal, and guarded. This exercise helps to regain a feeling of freedom and relaxation in the shoulder.

Drop your arm forward and allow it to just wobble very gently. Start making movements while feeling the relative comfort in the shoulder. Then start making little circular movements and swinging it in a small circle. Gradually increase the size of the circle, staying within your zone of comfort all the time.

**Arm Swing (Flexion and extension)**

The second exercise is to swing your arm in the plane that’s going to put food in your mouth. Start with a small swing and gradually increase this movement.
The important thing is to stay out of any feeling of pain. With this movement, you’re using your shoulder in the most comfortable way.

You are allowing the shoulder to hang and glide as best as it can. Try just swinging and getting back the feeling that your shoulder can move freely.

Walking up Wall

Next you’re going to explore the range of movement upwards. You starting to push the envelope of movement. Turn around and face the wall. Put your hand on the wall, and with your fingers, walk your hand up the wall as far as it will go.

Don’t force it, just walk your hand slowly up the wall. Try and not to pull your body back as you walk upwards. This is because most people start to do a lot of weird movements when the shoulder is painful.

Once you’ve walked your hand up the wall as far as you can, breathe in, breathe out, and wait two or three seconds. Then gently lean into the wall. This will stretch the shoulder a little bit.

Wall Stretch (Internal and External Rotation)

Having done that, the next experiment is to increase the external and internal rotation of your shoulder. You do this by turning your body one way, and then the other. By doing this you are rotating the head of the humerus.

Turn your body as far as it will go one way, breathe out, and then turn your body the other way as far as it’ll go.

Each time you when reach your limits, breathe in, breathe out, and just lean gently into the stretch. Then turn come back to face the wall, and slowly walk down your hand back down the wall.

What you’ve done is increase the range movement above your head. This is a very important movement; we use it for so many things. And it’s your first movement that you can get back as you rehabilitate a frozen shoulder.
Arm Behind Back (Extension and Internal Rotation)

The next movement you can then start to explore is bringing your arm behind you back. With a frozen shoulder, most people can’t get their hand behind their back.

Once you’ve had a hydrodilation treatment you can start freeing up your shoulder to practice this important movement. To start off, use your other hand to help you. Take the hand of your injured shoulder with the other hand from your good shoulder, and slip them both behind your back.

Gently lift the hand up, gliding it firmly up against your body and again till you reach your limit. Then breathe in, breathe out, and shift the hand up a little bit more.

You’re not trying to force anything. Just slowly breathe and gently increase the range of motion.
Pull arm Across Body (Adduction)

This movement helps to increase the movement of adduction in your shoulder.

Take the upper arm of your injured shoulder in one hand, and gently pull it across your body.

When you reach the limit of your comfortable stretch, breathe in, hold your breath for 5 seconds, and slowly breathe out.

As you breathe out, gently increase the stretch.

Hand Down Back (Pat Yourself on the Back 😊)

This movement increases the range of movement behind your back – and in the upper range of your shoulder.

You can do this by pushing your arm down your back with your good hand, or by taking a towel and pulling it down with your good arm to stretch your other arm behind your back.

Arm Back

Use a broom handle or anything similar to practise this stretch.

Hold onto one end of the broom with the hand of your injured shoulder. Use your other hand to push the broom behind you.

This stretches the range of movement of your arm behind you.

Arm Raise (Abduction)

The last movement to work on is raising your elbow up above your shoulder. To do this, put your hand on your shoulder joint, and allow the feeling of dropping as you lift you arm – this creates space in your shoulder joint so that you don’t get impingement of the humerus on the acromion.
If you are having difficulty doing this movement without pain, try raising the good arm first. Put your hand on your good shoulder joint, and feel what muscles are working to raise this arm with no pain. Then try to replicate this movement in your injured shoulder.

The important thing to concentrate on is doing this movement in a relaxed way, with no pain.

**Shoulder Strengthening Exercises**

**Yoga – The Cat Pose**

This is a lovely series of movements that works to strengthen the scapula stabilisers.

The Shoulder Squeeze
Squeeze shoulder blades together – with arms out and elbows at your sides. Squeeze together for a few seconds – then relax.

Advanced – lean onto soccer ball sized ball and move ball around – dynamic use of stabilisers

**Resistance Exercises**

You can do a lot of safe exercises just using your body resistance against yourself. This is especially helpful in the early stages of rehabilitation, when body weight exercises may be too much for your shoulder to safely support.

1. Squeeze both hands together in front of you. This resistance exercise helps to improve the strength of the internal rotation of your shoulder.

   Hold this position for as long as you can, slowly increasing pressure from both hands against each other.
2. This exercise is designed to strengthen the shoulder as you raise the arm up.

With your good arm, restrain your arm as you attempt to raise it up in front of you.

3. Stand next to a wall. With the hand of your injured shoulder against the wall, push up against the wall.

Hold this position as long as you can, then slowly relax the tension. You can do the adduction stretch (pulling your arm across your body) before doing another push against the wall.

Start with 20 seconds of pressure against the wall, and slowly increase this time.

4. This movement strengthens the external rotation of your shoulder.

Hold onto the hand of your injured shoulder with your good hand while you attempt to rotate your forearm outwards.

Both your elbows should be bent, and at just above waist height in front of you.

Resist the tension for 20-30 seconds, then relax.

Therabands – exercises pulling

Push towel up wall

Push hands outward to wall

Wall pushups