

When Is It Time for a Shoulder Replacement?

A Patient Case Example



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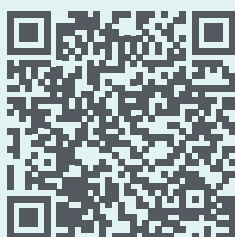
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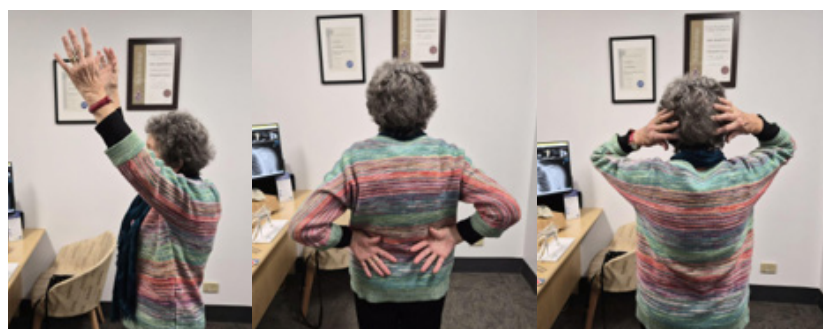
by Dr Ash Moaveni

Living with shoulder pain

An active woman presented with longstanding pain in her left shoulder that had gradually worsened over time.

She noticed ongoing discomfort that began to interfere with daily life. Sleep was often disrupted, and activities such as dressing, grooming and reaching overhead became increasingly difficult.

She also found it hard to comfortably lift her arm above shoulder height. Like many people, she had already tried several non-surgical approaches, including physiotherapy, medications and injections, but her symptoms continued to impact her function and quality of life.



Understanding the condition

Imaging confirmed advanced shoulder osteoarthritis, where the joint cartilage has worn away over time. In her case, there was also reduced function of the rotator cuff muscles, which play an important role in shoulder movement.

This combination of arthritis and rotator cuff dysfunction can contribute to pain, stiffness and reduced strength.

Exploring treatment options

Management of shoulder arthritis is tailored to each individual and usually begins with non-surgical care, such as:

- Physiotherapy and guided exercise
- Pain relief medications
- Activity modification
- Injections to help manage symptoms

When these approaches are no longer providing adequate relief, surgery may be considered as part of an individualised treatment plan.

Treatment

After careful assessment, the patient underwent a reverse shoulder replacement.

This type of shoulder replacement is designed for patients where the rotator cuff is not functioning well. It allows other muscles in the shoulder to help support movement.

Surgical techniques are selected based on each person's condition, lifestyle and overall health.



Moving forward

Following surgery and a structured rehabilitation program, the patient experienced a meaningful improvement in pain and function. She was able to gradually return to many everyday activities, including reaching overhead and performing personal care tasks more comfortably.

Recovery experiences vary between individuals, and outcomes depend on a range of factors including general health and participation in rehabilitation.

When to seek further advice

You may benefit from further assessment if you are experiencing:

- Persistent or worsening shoulder pain
- Pain affecting sleep
- Difficulty lifting your arm or reaching overhead
- Reduced ability to perform everyday tasks
- Limited improvement with physiotherapy or other treatments

Understanding shoulder replacement

There are different types of shoulder replacement surgery. The most suitable option depends on factors such as:

- The extent of arthritis
- Muscle and tendon function (including the rotator cuff)
- Your lifestyle and activity goals

A specialist can help guide you through your options and explain what may be appropriate for your situation.

Next steps

Shoulder pain and stiffness can be challenging, but support and treatment options are available. Early assessment can help you better understand your condition and the range of options that may be suitable for you.

If shoulder pain is affecting your daily life, speak with your GP about your symptoms or request a referral to an orthopaedic specialist for further assessment.

To learn more or make an enquiry, visit your nearest Healthscope hospital or specialist clinic. A personalised consultation can help determine the most appropriate next steps for your care.

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