

# Calcific Tendinopathy

## Information for patients

---

The information in this leaflet is intended solely as a guide. If you have questions about any aspect of your care or this booklet, please ask a health professional.

This leaflet will give you some information about:

- Calcific tendinopathy
- How you can help yourself with simple treatments
- Other treatment options.

### What is calcific tendinopathy?

Calcific tendinopathy (or calcific tendonitis) refers to a build-up of calcium in the rotator cuff tendons in the shoulder. This can cause irritation of the tendons and lead to pain.

The exact cause of calcium deposits within tendons is not well known. It tends to be more common in people aged between 30-60 years old. This is not a harmful or serious condition, and the majority of calcium deposits will disappear on their own.

### What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms include:

- Pain felt around the shoulder that can sometimes spread into the arm
- If the pain is severe, it might wake you or it can be uncomfortable to lie on at night
- You might find that it is difficult to move your arm, making daily activities difficult
- You might also feel that your shoulder is weak or stiff.

The pain can come on quite suddenly and be very intense, but it rarely means that the tendons have been damaged or are injured. In fact, it often means that the calcium deposit is dissolving on its own and is being reabsorbed by your body.

It can take up to 9 months (or sometimes longer) for the calcium to dissolve naturally, but often the pain will settle in a few weeks. In some cases you may feel milder pain for a longer time with this condition. This may affect your ability to work or do normal everyday activities.

### How is it diagnosed?

If calcific tendinopathy is suspected, an x-ray may be requested to confirm the diagnosis. Sometimes calcium deposits can be seen on x-rays but may not be related to your symptoms because calcium deposits don't always cause pain. Therefore it is always important to have your shoulder clinically assessed by an appropriate health professional.

## What can I do to help it?

Calcific tendinopathy is not a harmful or serious condition, and the majority of cases will settle down naturally with time. Some people may not want or need specific treatment and may decide to let their shoulder heal naturally. However, there are some things that you can do yourself (self-treatment) which may help to improve your shoulder pain.

In the early (acute) stages treatment involves managing symptoms, including:

- **Painkillers/ anti-inflammatory medication/ ice packs**  
You should consult your GP or pharmacist before taking medication- especially if you have other health problems.
- **Relative rest**  
You may have to take things easier for a couple of weeks and modify activities that cause you pain.
- **Maintaining movement**  
Try to keep your arm moving as your pain allows. This can help to prevent it getting weak and stiff. Try to get back to moving and using your arm normally as your pain eases.
- **Maintaining healthy lifestyle habits**  
Our general health can have an impact on the pain levels we experience. More Information can be found at the website below:

[www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living](http://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living)



## Exercises

In later stages, if you still have symptoms, exercises can be helpful to regain full function of your shoulder. These can be self-directed stretches and strengthening exercises or, if you feel you need more support, you may be referred to physiotherapy.

Visit the link or scan the QR code below for some shoulder exercises to get your arm moving:

### NHS Inform – Exercises for shoulder pain

[www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints/arm-shoulder-and-hand-problems-and-conditions/exercises-for-shoulder-problems/](http://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints/arm-shoulder-and-hand-problems-and-conditions/exercises-for-shoulder-problems/)



## Physiotherapy

Not everyone with calcific tendinopathy will require physiotherapy. However, if you have persistent symptoms and require more support, you may be referred to physiotherapy.

Through an examination, a physiotherapist can:

- Help you establish what might be causing your pain
- Provide you with a personal treatment plan to keep your shoulder strong and flexible and reduce the irritation on the tendons

Advise and arrange further investigation if required.

## Other treatment options

In some cases people may wish to consider other options if they are struggling with their symptoms. As these treatments are more invasive, they carry more risk. They may not be safe or appropriate for everyone.

Speak to your GP or health care professional about the options available to you.

These options may include:

- **Steroid injection**  
This can help to reduce inflammation and control pain in the acute stages. Sometimes the pain can come back when the steroid wears off but often it is not as severe.
- **Ultrasound guided injection/ barbotage**  
Under ultrasound guidance the calcium can be sucked out (aspirated) into a syringe. If this is not possible, then a needle can be used to try to break up the calcium so that it can be reabsorbed by your body - this is called barbotage.
- **Surgery**  
In rare situations the calcium may be removed surgically if the pain cannot be controlled with the methods described above.

