

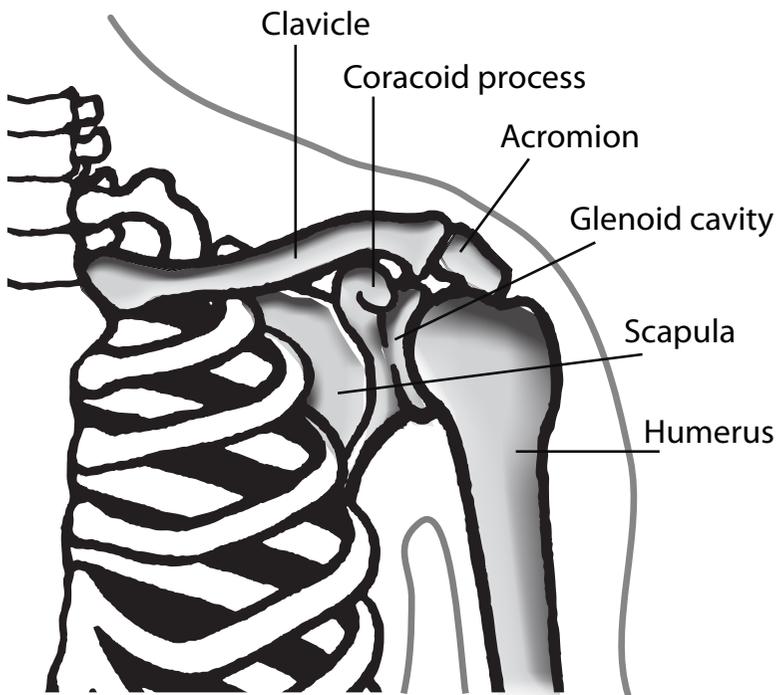
How to look after your arm following a Stroke



After a stroke it is important to take care of your arm to help to manage the affects of the stroke.

By following the advice in this booklet, you and your relatives can learn how to look after your arm which can reduce further problems developing.

Diagram of the shoulder area



The diagram above shows that the shoulder area has many bones and joints. To be able to keep these all stable the muscles that surround them need to be strong and not altered in length. Your stroke may cause changes to the way the muscles work, but the correct positioning and movement of your arm can help this.

A stroke will affect everyone differently, and can affect the arm in a variety of ways.

These can include:

- Weakness – muscle weakness reduces the movement and function of the arm.
- Change in muscle tone – this may be described as low (when muscles are floppy or loose), or high (when muscles are stiff and tight)
- Change in sensation – e.g. numbness, pins and needles or sensitive to touch. Some people also have poor awareness of their arm (known as neglect or inattention) which means it is difficult to know where the arm is and can lead to forgetting to use it or position it correctly.
- Subluxation – when the head of the humerus drops away from the socket. This can cause pain and be made worse by the weight of the arm pulling downwards.
- Swelling – fluid can collect in the hand if there is reduced movement because the muscles are not able to pump fluid away. Swelling can cause stiffness and reduced movement especially in the knuckles. You should consider removing any tight fitting rings.
- Contracture – muscles and the surrounding soft tissue can shorten due to not moving or increased tone.
- Pain – this can be due to poor positioning, tightening of soft tissue, subluxation or swelling of the arm. Even without these problems, some people may experience arm pain. This is due to the stroke causing changes in the brain.

How to position your arm

Position when Sitting



- Sitting upright and in the middle of the chair
- Arm on pillow and away from the body

Lying on affected side



- Arm lying comfortably away from the body

Lying on unaffected side



- Arm lying on top of a pillow for support and away from the body

Lying on your back



- Support your head and shoulders with pillows
- Affected arm on pillow away from body

How to hold, move and position your arm

Moving your arm on your own:

- Always try and move your arm in a gentle supportive way
- Moving your arm should not cause pain
- Involve the shoulder, elbow, wrist and fingers when moving or repositioning your arm.
- Your physiotherapist can show you how to handle your arm

Moving your arm with assistance from a relative or carer:



- Support under elbow
- Hold under wrist to control wrist and hand

What else can you do to help?

Use stretches, slings or supports and splints either on their own or in combination with one another.

These are in addition to your physiotherapy treatments to manage the effects of your stroke. Your physiotherapist will be able to discuss which of these are appropriate for you and how you should use them.

Slings or Supports

- You can use these to hold and support your shoulder
- The most common ones are polyslings, specialist stroke cuffs and pillows.
- Slings and supports are more suitable when you are moving around
- Pillows provide better support when you are resting.

Compression gloves

- You can use these to manage any swelling in your hand.

Stretching

- Stretching can help avoid the muscles in your arm becoming tight and sore.
- Your physiotherapist will show how to stretch your arm.

Wrist and Hand Splints

Can help to

- Limit the risk of contracture
- Keep your hand in a comfortable position

Things to Remember

- Please speak to your physiotherapist for specific advice about your own arm.
- Move your arm in a gentle and supportive way.
- Moving your arm should not cause you any pain.
- Always support your arm as shown in the diagrams
- Taking care of your arm is important and will compliment other treatments that your physiotherapist may be using.



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