

How to Treat Frozen Shoulder? Traditional Chinese Medicine Can Help Relieve Your Pain

[Wellness Chinese Medicine – Dr. Cao Yafei](#)

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Ms. Zhang had been suffering from right shoulder pain and limited mobility for several months. Diagnosed with frozen shoulder, her previous treatments yielded unsatisfactory results. The pain disrupted her sleep, and at times, the excruciating discomfort made daily tasks like dressing and combing her hair nearly impossible.

Seeking relief, Ms. Zhang consulted Dr. Cao Yafei. After a thorough examination, Dr. Cao utilized a combination of TCM techniques, including manual therapy, acupuncture, and infrared therapy. Over time, her pain significantly decreased, and her shoulder mobility improved.

What Is Frozen Shoulder?

Frozen shoulder is a broad term referring to non-infectious inflammation of the soft tissues around the shoulder joint, including tendons and ligaments. Conditions such as adhesive capsulitis, rotator cuff injuries, impingement syndrome, and bursitis fall under this umbrella term.

Narrowly defined, frozen shoulder (adhesive capsulitis) is characterized by shoulder pain and restricted movement, often caused by physical stress or age-related degeneration of soft tissues.

Causes

- Degenerative changes in the soft tissues of middle-aged and elderly individuals
- Chronic or acute injuries
- Exposure to cold
- Secondary issues from conditions like cervical spondylosis

Frozen shoulder commonly affects individuals aged 40–60, particularly women. About 20% of patients may develop symptoms in the opposite shoulder over time, with some experiencing bilateral issues.

Disease Progression

Frozen shoulder is self-limiting but can last a long time, progressing through three stages:

1. **Acute Phase (2–9 months):** Severe pain, especially at night, disrupting sleep.
2. **Adhesive Phase (4–12 months):** Pain decreases, but movement becomes severely restricted due to adhesions.
3. **Recovery Phase (5–26 months):** Pain diminishes, adhesions resolve, and mobility gradually improves.

Treatment and Misconceptions

Treatment Goals: Pain relief and mobility restoration. TCM methods, such as acupuncture and massage, are effective in reducing inflammation and improving circulation.

Common Misunderstandings:

1. **Frozen shoulder is a self-limiting disease and will heal on its own, so there's no need to see a doctor.**

Frozen shoulder includes many different subtypes, and other diseases can also cause shoulder pain. If symptoms arise, it's important to consult a doctor for a clear diagnosis to avoid delaying treatment. Early mismanagement of frozen shoulder can lead to muscle atrophy and loss of range of motion, making timely treatment essential.

2. **Frozen shoulder requires intense exercise; the more painful, the better.**

The main features of frozen shoulder are pain and limited mobility. Proper exercise is essential to restore joint function. However, excessive intensity can worsen the condition. Exercises should be performed within a range that does not cause significant pain.

3. **There's no effective treatment for this condition.**

Frozen shoulder stems from degeneration and acute or chronic injuries to the soft tissues around the shoulder joint. The condition often progresses slowly, so treatment requires patience and cannot be rushed.

4. **Treatment relies entirely on the doctor.**

While medical interventions are crucial, the patient's active cooperation is equally important. Functional exercises, keeping the shoulder warm, and protecting it from cold exposure significantly contribute to recovery.

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