

SHOULDER

Shoulder Arthritis

Shoulder arthritis is a condition where the cartilage in the shoulder joint wears away, causing pain, stiffness, and limited movement. The shoulder joint is where the humerus (upper arm bone) fits into the glenoid (part of the shoulder blade). When cartilage breaks down, the bones can rub against each other, leading to discomfort and swelling.

Types of shoulder arthritis

- Osteoarthritis (wear-and-tear arthritis) — the most common type, typically due to aging and long-term use
- Rheumatoid arthritis — caused by an autoimmune condition where the immune system attacks the joint
- Post-traumatic arthritis — develops after an injury or fracture to the shoulder joint

Symptoms

- Pain in the shoulder, especially with movement or at night
- Stiffness that makes it difficult to lift the arm or reach overhead
- Swelling and tenderness in the joint
- Limited range of motion

Treatment options

Conservative treatment is usually the first step, and includes physical therapy to strengthen muscles and improve movement, anti-inflammatory medication (NSAIDs), corticosteroid injections to reduce inflammation, and heat or ice for pain relief.

If conservative treatment does not relieve symptoms, shoulder replacement surgery may be an option for arthritis that severely limits daily activities.

Shoulder replacement surgery

There are two main types:

- Total shoulder replacement (TSA) — both the humeral head (ball) and the glenoid (socket) are replaced with artificial components. This is typically used for severe arthritis, and aims to relieve pain and improve function.
- Reverse shoulder replacement — used when there is damage to the rotator cuff, or when a standard total replacement would not be effective. The positions of the ball and socket are reversed, allowing the shoulder muscles to function differently, which provides more stability and reduces pain when the rotator cuff tendons are not working properly.

The choice between total and reverse shoulder replacement depends on the type of arthritis you have, whether there is damage to the rotator cuff tendons, and your overall health and activity level.

Recovery

After surgery, you will wear a sling for several weeks to protect your shoulder and follow a rehabilitation program to regain strength and range of motion. Full recovery typically takes three to six months, though this can vary.

Key benefits of shoulder replacement

- Pain relief — the main benefit of both types of surgery
- Improved mobility — both surgeries can help restore motion and function
- Less pain and stiffness, with many patients reporting significant improvements in quality of life after recovery