

Stepped physiotherapy for persistent shoulder pain

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Status	RECRUITING
Sponsor	University of Otago
Enrollment	200 participants

Plain Language Summary

Persistent shoulder pain related to the rotator cuff — the group of tendons and muscles that hold the shoulder joint together — is one of the most common reasons people see a physiotherapist. Most people improve with physiotherapy, but treatment approaches vary widely, and it is unclear whether a simpler 'stepped' approach (starting with less intensive care and only escalating if needed) works as well as immediately offering a full course of physiotherapy.

This trial compares a Stepped Care Model — starting with just two sessions focused on education and self-management strategies — against up to 10 sessions of standard physiotherapy from the outset. If patients in the stepped care group still have significant pain after 6 weeks, they are offered the full physiotherapy program.

You may be eligible if you are 18 or older, have had shoulder pain for at least 3 months, and the pain is consistent with rotator cuff syndrome. People with a history of shoulder surgery, known inflammatory conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, suspected massive rotator cuff tear, frozen shoulder, or a steroid injection within the past 3 months are not eligible.

Key Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion (1)

- (i) Men and women, age greater or equal to 18 years; (ii) pain duration 3 months or greater (as those with persistent pain account for most of the health system costs for shoulder pain); (iii) shoulder pain attributed to a rotator cuff related shoulder pain (rotator cuff syndrome) using valid diagnostic criteria.

Exclusion (1)

- (i) Past shoulder surgery, glenohumeral dislocation or fracture; (ii) known systemic inflammatory disorders, for example rheumatoid arthritis; (iii) cervical movement affecting shoulder pain; (iv) clinically suspected massive full thickness rotator cuff tears or frozen shoulder; (v) steroid injection for shoulder pain within the past 3 months.

Locations (1 total)

New Zealand