

Will Simple Hanging Help Your Shoulder Pain? Rotator Cuff Injury? Impingement? Tendonitis? Bursitis? Frozen Shoulder?

We first became aware of “hanging” for the treatment of shoulder pain several years back. We read an article touting its benefits. The concept of hanging to treat shoulder pain was developed by Dr. John M. Kirsch. Dr. Kirsch is a retired board-certified orthopedic surgeon. His book, *Shoulder Pain? The Solution & Prevention* outlines his theory as to why hanging is beneficial in the treatment of shoulder pain.

Testimonials in support of hanging are numerous in his book and, in many cases, quite passionate. I have included many examples in this print-out.

Dr. Kirsch cites the Kauai Study as proof that hanging can be an effective treatment against shoulder pain. The study included 92 participants, with the majority having suffered from shoulder pain for years. Most of the subjects had been advised to undergo shoulder surgery.

Most of the participants (72) had impingement syndrome. Sixteen subjects had a rotator cuff tear (confirmed by MRI), and the remaining 4 had frozen shoulder. Of the 92 subjects, 2 quit for personal reasons. All the remaining 90 participants were able to return to comfortable ADL (activities of daily living). Dr. Kirsch also provided three examples of study participants who were able to cancel shoulder replacement surgeries that had already been scheduled.

The hanging exercise is not for everyone. You should not perform the hanging treatments if you have unstable or dislocating shoulders. If you have severe osteoporosis (fragile bones), hanging is not for you. We would also avoid shoulder hanging if you are in poor physical health. As always, we recommend you see a health care professional before you try hanging.

Dr. Kirsch’s theory as to why hanging helps shoulder pain. What are the benefits of hanging?

Many shoulder problems can be attributed to poor posture, and a gradual shrinking of the space directly above the shoulder bone called the subacromial space. Rotator cuff tendons from muscles around the shoulder pass through the

subacromial space and can become irritated, impinged, and eventually damaged and torn from the decreased space.

It is Dr. Kirsch's theory that one can increase the subacromial space through hanging. Hanging can increase the subacromial space by reshaping and stretching the coracoacromial ligament and the acromion. It is not unlike the way orthodontists use to straighten teeth.

By increasing the subacromial space one can decrease the amount of stress and impingement taking place on the shoulder tendons.

How often and how long do you need to hang?

There is no specific right or wrong. Dr. Kirsch recommends starting by hanging for brief intervals (10 seconds or so followed by a 60 second rest). Palms of the hands should face forward, and you can apply either partial or full weight on your arms. Remove jewelry from your hands. Gloves can be used to reduce callouses. Weightlifting hooks can be used to reduce stress on your fingers and hands.

According to Dr. Kirsch most people will experience a fair amount of pain and discomfort with initial hanging, but it tends to diminish after a few moments. Also, Dr. Kirsch indicates that hanging will not damage your shoulder OR further damage a rotator cuff tear if you already have one.

Eventually Dr. Kirsch recommends hanging for 10 to 30 second intervals over a 10 to 15-minute period. You may be able to get by with much less.

See his book for recommendation on shoulder strengthening or follow our recommendations in our video entitled *How to Strengthen a Painful Shoulder.*

Bob and Brad Hanging Handles. See video for demonstration.

A. Partial hanging



B. Full Hanging



C. Facing the wall



Another hanging alternative: The Statue of Liberty stretch.

Using a Booyah stick or broom handle, anchor the bottom of the stick into the chair or floor. Reach up as high as possible on the stick with the painful shoulder arm. Lean forward with your body and let the arm and shoulder stretch for 10 to 20 seconds. Repeat and try sliding your hand further up the stick before leaning forward and stretching the arm once again.



Our final thoughts: If you have shoulder pain due to arthritis, impingement, bursitis, tendonitis, and/or rotator cuff tears, it may benefit you to consider a trial of hanging. Make sure your doctor approves before you proceed.