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Shoulder Shrugging

The Answers People Don't Want to Hear



tions about shoulder pain. After years of answering these questions, I have some advice on how *not* to let shoulder pain become a problem. Most of the time, the answers are simple, but changing behavior is difficult.

Do not permit shoulder pain to become chronic. When you sense the initial twinges of shoulder pain, stop the offending activity and allow the joint a chance to recover. In healthy individuals, the pain usually resolves with seven to ten days of rest. I am often called on to help athletes who have continued exercise activities despite the presence of significant shoulder pain. Absent earning your income by playing a sport, there is no reason to continue an exercise that produces pain.

Get into the warm up habit. When I question fitness participants and athletes in regards to their shoulder warm up routine, I hear "I do ten shoulder circles," or "I start with light weights and work up," or my favorite reply, "Nuthin." Most shoulder pain problems can be prevented with a consistent program of activation exercises before training. The more stressful the training event or competition, the more important a shoulder warm up routine becomes.

Physical therapists who spend time working in a fitness facility get many ques-

Take a shoulder activity inventory. This is a real life physical therapy patient with shoulder pain: Morning swim practice that lasts an hour, six days a week, volleyball practice three days a week, and two sessions of strength training every week. This athlete does not need physical therapy. She needs some rest.

Bench Press less. Most fitness guys perform lots of horizontal pushing: bench press, incline press, decline press... Eliminate shoulder joint overload with consistent modification of the horizontal push format. Take six weeks away from the barbell bench press and use a multi-grip bar instead. For shoulder health, drop the bench press all together and train horizontal push patterns with push ups on rings, sliders, loaded, etc... Try a four week challenge of a single arm dumbbell bench press. You will develop better scapula muscle control and reawaken your core stabilizers.

Improve your posture. The shoulder girdle sits on the rib cage and attaches via muscles that travel from the shoulder to the upper back and neck. If the shoulder launch platform is bent over and immobile, it is difficult to use the shoulder joint in an efficient and pain-free manner. For any lasting improvement in posture, you need to work on it all day long.

Ditch the biomechanical shoulder crushers. Many popular fitness activities place unnecessary stress on the shoulder joints. Upright rows, behind the neck press, behind the neck pull-downs, bench dips to name a few. Avoid muscle isolation drills and get stronger at multi-joint pull and push exercises such as push ups, suspension rows, and landmine press.

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Develop better shoulder mobility. It is not uncommon for an asymptomatic fitness client to demonstrate a 25% – 30% deficit in shoulder range of motion. Joints become unhealthy when deprived of movement. Foam roll mobility drills can rapidly restore lost shoulder range of motion. (See the video that accompanies this article.)

Row more and row often. The muscles that keep



the shoulder healthy are located on the back of the body and are activated by all variations of horizontal pulling.

Learn how to properly perform a horizontal row: stable spine, chest proud, and shoulder blades pulled back. The humeral head should not move forward during the row. If you are bothered by shoulder pain, take six weeks and train the muscles in the

back of the shoulder twice as much as the muscles in front of the shoulder. If you perform six sets of pressing exercises, you must then perform twelve sets of pulling exercises. My favorites are TRX inverted rows, cable face pulls, one arm dumbbell rows, and chest supported rows.

Don't do silly stuff. Your training program should reflect your fitness level and prior medical history. If you have undergone a surgical repair of the rotator cuff and are over the age of forty, then learning how to Olympic lift is not optimal for your shoulder. If you are a deconditioned office worker with a prior history of arthritis in the shoulder, then the annual gladiator fitness race is not a prudent fitness activity.

What is the generator of your pain problem? It might not be the shoulder joint that is creating your shoulder pain. Neck problems often refer pain to the shoulder girdle. An impingement of your fifth cervical nerve root can create the double whammy of shoulder pain as well as weakness in the deltoid and external rotators. An orthopedic physical therapist will be able to help you work this out.

-Michael O'Hara, P.T., OCS, CSCS

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The Secret Ingredient for Success

Wisdom from a Children's Movie

One of my favorite quotes actually comes from a children's movie—*Kung Fu Panda*. In the movie, the main character, Po, is selected to become the "Dragon Warrior." When he finally earns the Dragon Scroll, everyone is dumbfounded to find that the scroll is blank. In addition, as everyone in the village frantically prepares for the villain Tai Lung's arrival, Po's father let's him in on the family's secret soup ingredient. He confides, "*There is no secret ingredient.*" Po is initially baffled, but then comes to realize that he has everything he needs to defeat Tai Lung.

"There is no secret ingredient" has so much carry-over into the fitness world. Everyone is searching for that one exercise, workout, tip, food, diet, etc. that will be a game changer. Most of the things people focus on are of little importance. The real secret is consistency and doing a little bit more/working a bit harder today than you did yesterday while remaining injury-free. This isn't flashy though, and you can't put it in a bottle to sell. It will never attract your attention like the 21 day fix, cleanse diet, or 10 minute ab workout.

While watching *Kung Fu Panda 3* with my boys a couple of weeks ago, I got another great gem—"*Your real strength comes from being your best you.*" In the fitness world, we often hear that certain exercises and nutritional approaches are the absolute best and that everybody should be doing them. The truth is that various differences make it difficult to paint things with a broad brush. Things like food tol-

erance, preference, and schedule make the ideal nutrition plan very different from one person to the next. When it comes to training, there are variations in limb lengths, joint angles, muscle/tendon insertion points, spinal alignment, and much more that make certain exercises productive for some and not so great for others.



The key is to find things that you enjoy, include some things that you don't hate and can tolerate (what you need to do), and avoid the things that hurt or feel awkward (even with lots of practice and instruction). You want to find exercises and nutritional approaches that you can maintain for a lifetime.

Find what fits your body, lifestyle, and preferences. Choose what allows you to constantly lift more, work a little bit harder, and take you closer to your goals while not neglecting any one area of fitness entirely.

If you're not sure where to start, feel free to schedule an assessment in order to help you set up a sensible plan for YOU.

-Jeff Tirrell, CSCS, Pn1

Beating the Odds



"Congratulations! You beat the odds!"

Fenton Fitness member and former Fenton Physical Therapy patient Dolly Cox just heard this good news from her doctor after waiting a week for her biopsy results. She had been encouraged to prepare for the worst because, for 9 out of 10 women her age, the result is cancer.

"I owe much of this to Fenton Fitness. Since joining a year ago, I have become so much stronger in body, mind, and food control."

Her good news was celebrated on July 11th, her 78th birthday, proving once again that age does not define us but we define our age. Dolly recently renewed her annual Semi-Private Training membership and continues to incorporate Nutrition Coaching into her health and wellness plan.

Four Reasons to Love Single Leg Hip Thrusts

The Hip Thruster unit was created by Brett Contreas and is manufactured by Sorinex. It creates a ready-to-go station for a very beneficial and easy to learn lower extremity exercise. You can load the Hip Thruster exercise with a barbell, sandbag, or a resistance band. The gluteal muscles are the primary drivers of hip extension and, in this day and age of all things sitting, we have an epidemic of gluteal atrophy and desperately need more hip extension exercise. Weak glute muscles and poor hip extension range of motion have been implicated in lower back pain and a higher incidence of knee injuries. Inhibited glute firing allows the head of the femur to glide forward in the hip socket leading to early degenerative changes in the hip joint. The simple hip thrust exercise will change how you feel, function, and look. My favorite exercise on the hip thrust bench is the single leg hip thrust. I have four reasons why you should add this exercise to your program.

Number 1: Anti-rotation hip stabilization during resisted hip extension

When you perform the hip thrust on one leg you must fire the hip rotator muscle as stabilizers to prevent yourself from tipping over. Rotational forces are supposed to be managed by the hips and not the joints above and below the hips. Developing this co-contraction skill at the hip reduces damaging stress at the knee and lower back.

Number 2: Resolution of performance asymmetries

Resolving performance asymmetries makes you more durable and improves performance. If you can perform fifteen perfect single leg hip thrusts on the right and only six perfect repetitions on the left, you have a performance asymmetry that needs to be fixed.

Number 3: Lateral subsystem activation

The series of muscles that holds the body stable during single leg work is the lateral subsystem. It is made up of the quadratus lumborum, gluteus medius, hip adductors, and obliques. They function as a team to produce the "super stiffness" effect at the pelvic girdle and spine. Extension at the hip will produce more efficient movement when coupled with a stable spine and pelvis.

Number 4: Improvement of single leg functional strength and endurance

We all function as monopods, moving from leg to leg as we travel through life. On the field of play, it is all about single leg balance, mobility, coordination, and strength. If your fitness training is going to carry over to real life performance, it must be performed one leg at a time.

Training Suggestion: Weak gluteal muscles and



tight hip flexors are best friends forever. Prolonged sitting squashes your gluteals and shortens the hip flexors. Pair your hip thruster exercise with some dedicated hip flex-

or stretching. Watch the video and get your glutes in gear.

-Michael S. O'Hara, P.T., OCS, CSCS

YouTube

Video demonstration of single leg hip thrusts can be found on our youtube channel at :<https://youtu.be/>

Additional Resources

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