

Shoulders!

By Scott Lohmann, Instructor, Adaptive P.E.

Have you been experiencing shoulder and or neck pain? Do you feel like your posture is slowly getting worse? If you are, I want you to understand that this is not an age-related problem. It's largely a function of your strength and movement quality. Bad posture and neck/shoulder pain can be corrected and I am going to give you some useful tools to help alleviate the problem.

First thing I want to talk about is shoulder blades. They are the key to solving shoulder, posture, and neck issues. First thing I want you to try is standing up with good posture. Feet should be pointed straight ahead and lined up with the hips, weight needs to be properly distributed to both legs and your eyes should be looking straight ahead. From this position I want you to first elevate your shoulders. Next, depress your shoulders. I am going to predict that if you're experiencing tightness and pain when you depress your shoulders you definitely have weakness in some very important muscles. I will get back to those in a moment.

From the standing position I want you to bring one or both arms out in front of you. Once again, keeping your vision looking forward and your feet beneath your hips, try bringing your shoulders forward without bending your elbow. You want to initiate the movement by using the shoulder blades and not the elbow. If you find yourself unable to move the shoulders forward using the shoulder blades, that is evidence that another crucial muscle for shoulder stability is not working. The last move is in the same position only this time you're going to squeeze your shoulder blades in and bring the shoulder blades back. If you can't perform this movement and or experience pain while squeezing your shoulder blades together you definitely have a shoulder impingement or injury.

Now we know the problem and we can fix it with some simple important movements! First off find a towel and pillow; next find a comfortable spot on the floor. If you have carpet I recommend lying there rather than on hardwood or tile. Roll up the towel lengthwise and place it on the floor. Then lay lengthwise on the towel making sure it is between the shoulder blades. If you are uncomfortable make sure you have a pillow or two for your head. Once you are ready you are going to keep your arms straight with your back flat and knees bent. Try bringing your shoulders forward as far as you can by using only the shoulder blades. Once shoulders are forward squeeze the shoulder blades in and retract the shoulders back. The first movement should be hard; the shoulder retraction should be easy since it will be assisted by gravity. Repeat the process and try to refine and smooth your movement.

Another exercise that will help your shoulders is to get a Thera-band (an elastic therapy band) and wrap it around a hook, a strong towel rack or even a handrail. You want to hold the band with both hands and walk back far enough until you feel tension in the band itself. You can control the amount of tension based upon where you stand. The closer you are the easier it will be to pull. I prefer you perform this exercise standing; however, if balance is an issue, feel free to sit on a chair. Try to mount the band so it is higher than your shoulders. Sitting with good posture, neck and hips properly aligned, pull the arms back and squeeze the shoulder blades together. Slowly straighten the arms making sure the shoulder and upper back muscles stay engaged. Repeat the process for three sets. I would not overdo the repetitions--8 to 12 is a good amount of reps. Make sure the quality of movement is good and that you are feeling your shoulder blades retract every time you pull.

Try these exercises daily. You really don't have to spend more than 10 minutes. Perform 8 to 12 repetitions for both exercises and really try to feel the muscles controlling your shoulder blades. I know shoulders can be frustrating and painful but you can correct it with proper joint mobility and strength. Try these exercises and see how you feel in a few weeks to a month. If you have any questions, come see us in Adaptive P.E.!