



Save Your Shoulders!

2 Exercises to Reduce Injury Risk

By Peggy Lamb

Dull ache in your deltoids? Screaming pain between your shoulder blades? Those aches and pains could be from **locked-long**, weak, and flaccid external rotators (infraspinatus and teres minor) and scapulae retractors (rhomboids and middle trapezius). Because our work requires so much shoulder and arm movement, massage therapists are at high risk for rotator cuff injuries. Save your shoulders—and your career—with two simple strength-training exercises for those overburdened and exhausted muscles. They will thank you!

“LOCKED LONG”: A muscle that is locked in a stretched state. The opposite condition is “locked short,” a muscle that is locked in a bunched or shortened state. The concept originated with Thomas Myers, in his book *Anatomy Trains* (Churchill Livingstone, 2014).

PULL DOWNS

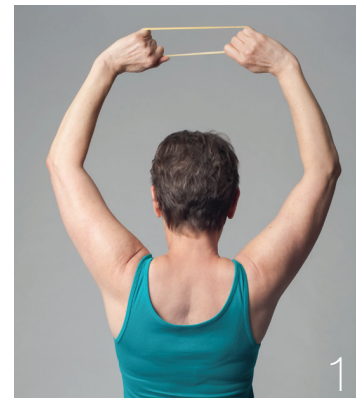
Primary muscles worked: middle and lower trapezius, rhomboids, latissimus dorsi. This exercise has the added benefit of stretching the internal rotators, especially the pectoralis major.

- Grasp a resistance band, palms facing out, arms overhead (Image 1).
- Squeeze the scapulae together, pull the band apart, and lower the arms to shoulder level behind the middle of the head (Image 2). Hold for 10 seconds.

Start with one set of 10 repetitions, and gradually increase to three sets of 10. Doing just three repetitions will bring the torso into alignment with the pelvis. Everyone should keep a resistance band by the computer, and every massage therapist should do a few pull downs between clients.

Errors to Avoid

- Jutting the chin and neck forward. Maintain proper cervical alignment.
- Allowing the shoulders to rise up toward the ears. Ensure the shoulders stay in a neutral position.
- Allowing the pelvis to tilt forward. Maintain proper lumbar alignment.



SHOULDER OPENERS


Primary muscles worked: infraspinatus and teres minor.

- Grasp a resistance band or one 5-pound weight in each hand, palms facing each other, with elbows at your waist (Image 3).
- Keeping your elbows fixed to your waist, slowly pull the band or weights apart and hold for 15 seconds (Image 4). Gradually return to the starting position.

The return motion provides eccentric strengthening. Most injuries to these muscles occur from eccentric overload, so gradual strengthening on the return is a good preventive exercise. Start with one set of 10 repetitions, and gradually increase to three sets of 10.

Errors to Avoid

- Hyperextending and leading with the wrists. The wrists should remain in a neutral position.
- Increasing the bend in the elbow as you separate the forearms. Maintain a 90-degree angle.
- Letting the elbows come away from the body. Make sure they remain close to the waist. **m&b**

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