

Shoulder Tension?

By Eric Pranzalone, Personal Fitness Trainer

Our joints are surrounded by muscles, which pull on the joint in different directions. Some muscles cause the movements of our joints and some stabilize the movements, keeping all the moving parts of the joint in balance. When stabilization of the shoulder girdle becomes faulty, the joint becomes out of balance. Imbalanced movement usually leads to wear and tear, causing discomfort. This discomfort can be anything from tension, stress injuries and/or acute pain. In the case of the shoulder girdle, shoulder and neck tension can be caused by a muscle imbalance.

Many people experience neck and shoulder tension related to sustained postures, physical stress and emotional stress. In these cases, a movement disorder called "scapular downward rotation syndrome" may be involved. Basically, the muscles that control the movement of the scapula (or the shoulder blade) fall out of balance. The muscles, which elevate and downwardly rotate the shoulder blade, get short and tight, while the muscles, which oppose these movements, get underactive and long. The usual suspects in this case are the rhomboid, the upper trapezius, and the levator scapula muscles. Respectively, they lie between the shoulder blades, along the top of the shoulder, and between the shoulder blade and the neck—basically where you may often feel tension and discomfort. These muscles are short and tight because they are overactive and won't relax and lengthen.

The exercise, which I call the shoulder dip, can help with muscle tension. Because the cause of this tension can be the result of an imbalance in the use of different muscles around the shoulder, exercise can play a significant and necessary role in correcting chronic shoulder and neck tension. When the shoulder muscles are imbalanced in this way, shoulder dips can increase the use of these underactive muscles. This exercise can also stretch and relax those tight shoulder and neck muscles. Usually the more out of balance the shoulder muscles are, the more practice with the exercise will be needed. In my experience, most people notice immediate improvement in how their shoulders feel even after one set.

Begin as if you are doing a classic tricep bench dip. Support yourself with your hands on the edge of a bench.

Without bending your elbows, allow your shoulders to shrug up to your ears, lowering your body. Dip down as far as you can. The key is to let your shoulders shrug all the way up to your ears. Sometimes if there is too much weight on your shoulders, they won't relax and allow you to shrug. Bring your feet in closer to the bench to decrease the weight for the exercise. (maybe two small pics here, one with feet out and another with feet in)

Using only your back and shoulder muscles, press your shoulders down, raising your body up. Imagine you are "squeezing your armpits." Press yourself up as far as you can. Remember the point is to move your shoulders through as wide of a range of motion as you can comfortably.

