

Waking up the muscles of the shoulder blades

If you are like most of us in the Western world, you probably spend a good part of your day sitting at the computer, sitting in your car, sitting in front of the television, sitting at your desk hunched over important papers. We could spend our day sitting in lotus with our back straight and our shoulders broad, blissing out as we meditate. Unfortunately, most of us end up slouching on the couch. Our shoulders are rounded forward and our chest is sunken. We know we should sit up straight, but it just takes too much darn effort! Later, we find our way into a yoga class and we are asked to stand tall, roll our shoulders back, and lift our sternum (breastbone). We maintain this well enough until we come to chaturanga dandasana (the yoga version of push-ups) and have to keep the good posture while supporting much of our weight on our hands! Suddenly our shoulders are rounding toward the floor and all we can feel is our chest and our arms. Our back muscles are at home on the couch.

Many of us complain of shoulder pain with repeated push-ups. This shoulder pain can be given many different labels: repetitive trauma (overuse) injury, impingement syndrome, thoracic outlet syndrome, shoulder instability, rotator cuff tear, tendonitis, etc. Regardless of which diagnosis is given, the condition is usually due to a muscular imbalance in the shoulder region: the anterior (front) muscles are tight and the posterior (back) muscles are overstretched and/or weak. This leads to faulty mechanics in the shoulder region and the development of a painful shoulder syndrome.

To perform push-ups safely, the rotator cuff muscles must be engaged. These include the four "shoulder blade muscles" known as the SITS muscles: supraspinatus, infraspinatus, teres minor, and subscapularis. These muscles work in concert with the other back muscles (e.g., the serratus anterior, lower trapezius, and latissimus dorsi), to create a healthy balance in the shoulder and support a strong push-up position.

Waking Up What Is Back There:

- Lie on your back with your feet on the floor. Bring the arms straight up toward the ceiling. Draw the arms further up to the ceiling, noticing how that makes you round your upper back. Now keep the arms reaching, but actively draw the backs of the shoulders toward the floor and allow your upper back to flatten against the ground. Notice how this opens the chest. Can you feel muscles around your shoulder blades working? Often, we just need to put our mind in the area of our body we want to engage, and then those muscles will "kick in".
- A classic way to strengthen the rotator cuff muscles (on and around the shoulder blades) can be done from lying on your side. Bend the elbow of your top arm 90 degrees, placing your upper arm against your torso. Squeezing your elbow tight against the side of your waist and keeping your upper arm glued to your side (this is key), begin to draw your forearm toward the ceiling. Done correctly, you should feel the rotator cuff muscles at your shoulder blade working. As you get stronger, you can add a small weight to your hand. It is important that you keep your shoulder drawn down away from your ear, and you keep your elbow tucked in at the side of your waist. The upper arm stays glued to your side.
- Come into plank pose, or the top of a push-up. Place your shoulders above your wrists, firm your legs and reach your heels back. Soften the buttocks and feel the tone of your lower belly inviting the tail bone toward your pubic bone. Now draw the shoulder blades down your back with the lower tips drawing in against the back ribs. Press the hands evenly into the floor. Feel the clavicles (collarbones) widen, the chest open, and the sternum (breastbone) draw forward. Cultivate a sense of steadiness as you breathe. Bring your attention to the rotator cuff muscles at the shoulder blades and feel how they provide stability to the shoulders. This position, in itself, can cultivate quite a bit of strength, preparing your back and shoulder muscles for the bottom of your push-up.
- As you lower into the bottom of your push-up, keep the same alignment that you had in plank pose. Employ the rotator cuff muscles by actively rolling the shoulders up away from the floor as you lower. The shoulders should not go below the line of the elbows. Feel your back and shoulder muscles engage while spreading the clavicles and opening the heart.

Postage

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Upcoming Events & Workshops

*An Evening of Holistic Play in Niwot, CO June 27th.
Sadhana West Yoga, Second Avenue, Niwot 6-9pm*

Enjoy complimentary wine and cheese while you sample a variety of integrative healing modalities from the experts in Niwot, Colorado. I will be offering free mini physical rehab sessions. It is also an opportunity to purchase my audio CDs, buy my new and awesome salad recipe book, and sign-up to win a free one hour private session in your home!

*Mountain Lakes Yoga Backpacking Retreat with the
Women's Wilderness Institute July 18-20*

Connect with your core! Draw inspiration and relish the serenity of the wilderness on this wonderful retreat. Daily yoga practice is combined with gentle hiking to create an experience abundant in relaxation, natural beauty and fun. Call 303-938-9191 for more information.

