

Proper Training for the Shoulders

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The first thing to understand in big, strong, and well-defined shoulders is to not over-train them. Your shoulder muscles (deltoids, rhomboids,) are designed to stabilize your shoulder throughout a variety of movements with your arms. For example, although it's your lats and triceps that are primarily responsible for the "throwing" motion, your shoulder muscles allow the head of our humerus to rotate and stay in your shoulder socket. The following information should give coaches and athletes a good idea on how the shoulders should best be trained.

Stabilization

Beyond stabilizing the joint, your shoulders are heavily responsible for pressing movements and exercises, especially the ones you do overhead. Exercises like Dumbbell Overhead Press, Dumbbell Incline Press, Bench Press, and Push-Ups put your shoulders under tremendous stress. In fact, it's almost impossible to isolate just your shoulder muscles when training because they play such a large role in stabilization in all upper-body exercises (CHEST and BACK).

Over-training minimizes gains

A major reason some athletes don't see the size and strength development in their shoulders is because their shoulder muscles are over-trained. Because the shoulders are so heavily worked during chest and back training, there's NO reason to train the shoulders just as hard. Too many athletes and coaches want to hit the shoulders just as they've trained their CHEST, BACK, and LEGS. This is a big mistake. Remember, even though you're emphasizing your CHEST, your shoulders are working just as hard. You perform only 2-4 sets of CHEST exercises in a workout, and piling another 2-4 sets of shoulder exercises in the same day is far too much. Notice on all strengthcoach.com workouts that you're to perform only 1-2 sets for the shoulders. Understanding that the shoulders can easily be over trained is a key point when attempting to develop big and powerful shoulders.

Preventing shoulder injuries

A common mistake athletes, coaches, and trainers make is over training the front (anterior) portion of the shoulder. Too much emphasis is typically placed on pressing movements (i.e. CHEST exercises). In many cases, the internal rotator cuff muscles (also part of the front shoulder) are also over trained. In addition, if your weight training program attempts to be too sports specific, it can easily lead you to over train and potential injury. Let me give you an example: A volleyball or water polo player trains and strengthens the front portion of their shoulder muscles during every practice. Each time athletes throw or swing, their shoulders (anterior or front portion), triceps, and their lat muscle are heavily used. After two hours of practice and hundreds of swings and throws later, their shoulders have had plenty of work. And, emphasizing more shoulder and CHEST exercise after practice places unneeded stress on the shoulders, and could eventually lead to poorer muscular development and eventual overuse injury.

Shoulder exercises you should do

The area of the shoulder athletes and coaches neglect most is the back (or posterior) portion of their shoulders. Your posterior cuff muscles (back of shoulder) are responsible for slowing your arm down after the ball leaves your hand, for example. This is a critical point to understand! It takes a tremendous amount of strength to slow your arm down after you have thrown something. If not, your shoulder would just fly out of its socket. So, after a practice and tons of shoulder workout during practice, what needs to be trained in the weight room are your posterior shoulder muscles. Exercises such as Rear Shoulder Raise, External Rotations, and Low Cable Row are great ways to properly train your shoulders. Look on most strengthcoach.com programs and you'll find the shoulder exercises I emphasize are the ones that place most stress on the posterior

(back) of the shoulder. So, when training your shoulders, choose exercises that isolate the back of the shoulder, limit possible over-training and injury, and maximize muscles development.

Limit range of motion

Another key point to understand is how far your range of motion should be when training your shoulders. Your body is designed to keep your hands relatively far away from your body. This is where you are strongest and have the most leverage. For example, during the Bench Press you are much stronger when your arms are extended than if the bar is touching your chest and your arms are close to your armpits. Letting your hands get too close to your body during training places tremendous stress on the shoulder joint and its surround muscles. So, during the Bench Press example, stop the bar from touching your chest 2-3 inches away from you. Do this by placing a rolled up towel on your chest. When lifting, slowly lower the bar until it touches the towel, pause for a moment, and then slowly return the bar in the extended position. Apply the same concept to your Dumbbell Shoulder Press. Don't let the dumbbells go below the level of your ears. Stop the weight during the downward phase of the movement when your arms get to 90 degrees, or dumbbells even with your ears. Limiting your range of motion and lifting according to your body's biomechanical design will help you achieve healthy and powerful shoulders.

Keys to success

Make sure you always lift slow and controlled with all of your shoulder training exercises. Keep in mind that the goal is to fatigue the muscles around the shoulder and not necessarily to see how much weight you can lift. Your shoulder development will result from not placing too much emphasis on shoulder training exercises. Too much shoulder work will lead over training, possible injury, and inferior muscular development. Practice, CHEST exercises and BACK exercises are typically enough for what your shoulders can handle. The shoulder work you do should include plenty of posterior cuff training that emphasizes the back part of your shoulder muscles.