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UPPER BACK STRENGTH

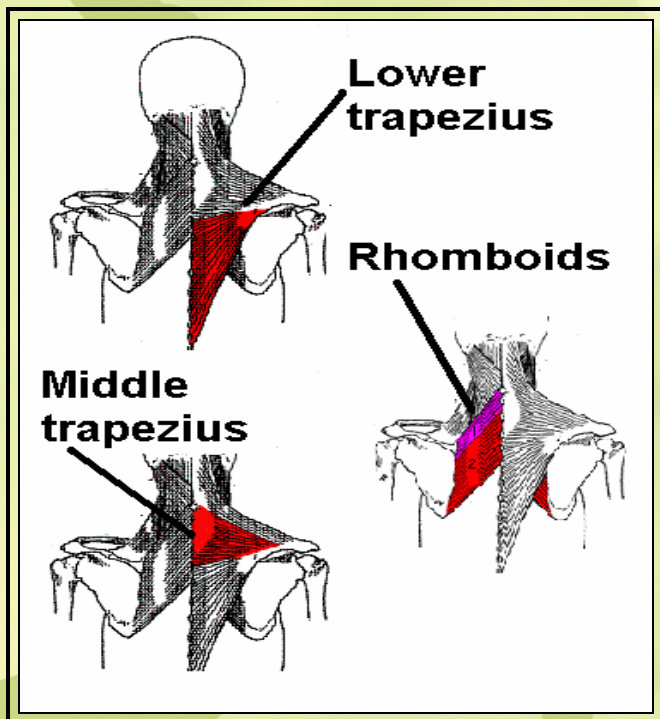
APRIL 2007 NEWSLETTER

Last month when I talked about shoulder anatomy, I promised this month to pass on some strengtheners and stimulators for muscles associated with the shoulder blades (pics from Core Performance, Mark Verstegen).

Muscles have two types of fibers ... slow twitch and fast twitch, and one type usually predominates, especially in certain muscles. We're going to focus on a few main characteristics of *fast twitch* muscles:

- These are responsible for movements which require speed
- They fatigue rapidly, sometimes after only a few contractions
- They respond to disuse or stress *by weakening and stretching*, and thus, often result in knots/trigger points (see Sept 2006 Triggerpoints in the newsletter archives to find out more on this topic)

So let's talk specifically about some fast twitch muscles that attach to your spinal vertebrae and the insides of your shoulder blades ... these are the middle and lower fibers of trapezius and the rhomboids as shown in the pictures. These muscles tend to be stretched out when we have our arms in front of us for extended periods of time (driving, computer work, assembly work, massage, etc), and thus end up getting weakened and full of knots. You know that all-too-familiar, unpleasant, burning, achey and tight feeling between your shoulder blades? Yup, those are the usual suspects! These muscles are rarely actively contracted in the course of our daily activities (ie: squeezing the shoulder blades together), and so they continue to remain weak, achey and knotty. Here then, are some exercises you can do to strengthen these muscles:



These pics from <http://www.exrx.net>, an excellent site

- Do at least 2 to 3 times a week for maximum benefit
- 1 or 2 sets of 10 reps
- start with no weights, using gravity as your resistance
- you can hold it for 2 seconds at the top before lowering and repeating
- progress in one pound increments as you get stronger
- these can be done also off the edge of your bed, on a weight bench, or on the floor

Strengthening this area will help keep your shoulders back naturally in good posture, instead of trying to consciously "remember" to keep them back (this is impossible and mentally exhausting!) If you need clarification on how to do these, please do not hesitate to contact me.



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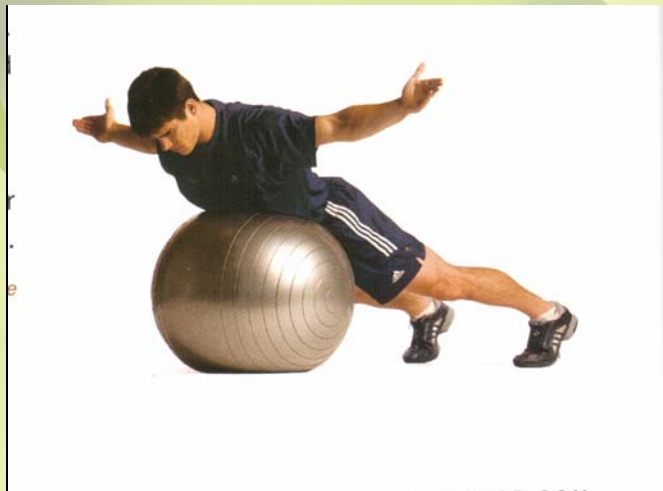
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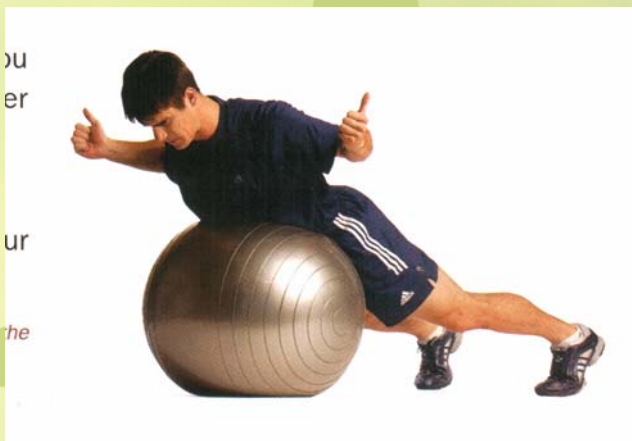
"Y's"

- Start with your arms hanging down toward the floor
- Keeping your thumbs upward, lift your arms up above your head to form a Y
- Lower and repeat
- You should feel it in your back, lower shoulder blades and fronts of shoulders



"T's"

- Start with your arms hanging down towards the floor
- pull your shoulder blades toward your spine while raising your arms up to the side in line with your back
- your palms should be facing forward (or north), thumbs up toward the ceiling, and your arms long and straight
- Lower and repeat
- You should feel it in the back of your shoulders and in your upper back between the shoulder blades



"W's"

- Start with your elbows close to your ribs and your thumbs up
- Squeeze the bottom points of your shoulder blades down towards your feet and try to raise your forearms up toward the ceiling
- Relax and repeat
- You should feel it in the back of your shoulders