

Scapular Mobility & Neck / Upper Back Pain

Home exercise program

Do this daily habit every day. Do the exercise session 3 times per week (e.g. Monday / Wednesday / Friday), always in the order below — the stretches loosen tight muscles so the strengthening exercises work better.

Daily Habit

Do these every day, not just on session days.

Chin Tucks

10 reps, several times per day

Targets: deep neck flexors; corrects a forward-head posture.

How to: Sitting or standing tall, gently draw your chin straight back as if making a "double chin," without tilting your head down or up. Hold 2–3 seconds and release. Keep your shoulders relaxed — this is a small, subtle movement.

Doorway Pec Stretch

30 sec x 2, each side

Targets: pectoralis major/minor — the chest muscles that pull the shoulders forward and round the upper back.

How to: Stand in a doorway and place your forearm on the frame with your elbow at shoulder height. Step forward through the doorway until you feel a gentle stretch across the front of your chest and shoulder. Keep your torso upright — don't arch your low back to get more stretch.

Phase 1 — Mobilize (about 5 minutes)

Loosens tight structures before the strengthening work.

Foam Roll Thoracic Spine

1 minute

Targets: muscle tension and fascia along the mid-back.

How to: Lie on your back with a foam roller placed horizontally under your shoulder blades, knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Support your head with your hands and gently roll up and down over the mid-back region.

Thoracic Extension Over Roller

10 reps

Targets: thoracic spine extension; counteracts a rounded, slouched upper back.

How to: Position the roller at bra-line/mid-back level, hands laced behind your head. Gently extend backward over the roller, then return to the starting position. Move slowly and stop at the point of a stretch — never push into pain.

Doorway Pec Stretch

30 sec x 2, each side

Targets: see above.

How to: Same as the daily habit version above.

Levator Scapulae / Upper Trap Stretch

30 sec, each side

Targets: levator scapulae and upper trapezius — commonly tight and tender in neck and upper back pain.

How to: Sitting tall, turn your head about 45° away from the tight side, then gently tilt your chin down toward your armpit. Use the same-side hand to apply gentle overpressure on the back of your head. You should feel a stretch along the side/back of the neck, never sharp pain.

Phase 2 — Activate (about 10–12 minutes)

Strengthens the muscles that stabilize and control the shoulder blade.

Wall Slides (Wall Angels)

2 sets x 12 reps

Targets: lower trapezius; control of shoulder blade rotation.

How to: Stand with your head, upper back, and arms against a wall in a "goalpost" position (elbows and wrists touching the wall). Slowly slide your arms up overhead and back down, keeping contact with the wall the whole time. Don't let your low back arch off the wall.

Scapular Push-Up Plus

2 sets x 12 reps

Targets: serratus anterior — often the weak link behind scapular dysfunction.

How to: From a plank or push-up position (or on your knees for an easier version), keep your elbows straight and move only your shoulder blades: push the floor away, rounding your upper back slightly (the "plus"), then let your shoulder blades relax back together. No elbow bending.

Prone Y-T-W Raises

2 sets x 8 reps, each letter

Targets: lower trapezius (Y), mid-trapezius/rhomboids (T), and rear deltoid/rhomboids (W).

How to: Lying face down on a bed, bench, or mat, raise your arms into a "Y" shape and lift slightly off the surface, squeezing your shoulder blades down and together, then lower. Repeat in a "T" shape (arms straight out to the sides), then a "W" shape (elbows bent, hands near shoulders). Start with no added weight, keep your neck neutral, and avoid shrugging.

Band Pull-Aparts

3 sets x 15 reps

Targets: rhomboids, mid-trapezius, and rear deltoid.

How to: Hold a light resistance band with arms straight out in front at chest height, palms down. Pull the band apart by squeezing your shoulder blades together, keeping your arms straight throughout. Slowly return to the starting position — don't let the band snap back.

Stop any exercise that causes sharp or radiating pain and contact your provider.