

ROTATOR CUFF

Home Strengthening Program



Stanford
MEDICINE

Key Principles

These exercises should not hurt. Work in the range that is comfortable and **stop short of pain.** If an exercise is painful, reduce the resistance or the range rather than pushing through it.

The goal is to build strength and control in the muscles that hold the shoulder centered and move the shoulder blade well. **Strength gains take weeks to months, so consistency matters.**

YOUR HOME PROGRAM

Warm up first with 5 to 10 minutes of walking, a stationary bike, or another easy activity. Start each session with stretches, then move to the strengthening exercises.

Do the stretches 5 to 6 days per week and the strengthening exercises 3 days per week on non-consecutive days. Begin strengthening with 3 sets of 8 repetitions and progress to 3 sets of 12 before increasing resistance. Finish each session by repeating the stretches.

Continue this program for 6-12 weeks unless told otherwise. After that, performing these exercises 2 to 3 days per week will maintain the strength and motion you have gained.

What you need: ☐ Resistance band ☐ Light hand weights ☐ Light stick or cane ☐ Small towel ☐ Sturdy chair or table

1 STRETCHES

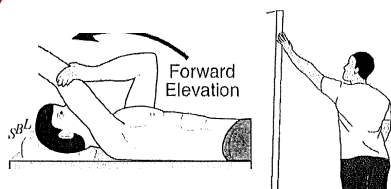
5 to 6 days per week



1 Pendulum

2 sets of 10

Lean forward and place one hand on a counter or table for support, letting the other arm hang freely. Gently swing the arm forward and back, then side to side, then in circles. Do not round your back or lock your knees.



2 Assisted forward elevation

4 each side • hold 30 seconds, relax 30 seconds

Lie flat on your back and grasp the wrist of the affected arm with the opposite hand. Use the good arm to bring the affected arm up overhead as far as is comfortable.

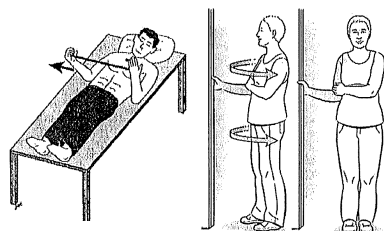
Alternative - Walk your hand up a wall.



3 Cross-body stretch

4 each side • hold 30 seconds, relax 30 seconds

Relax your shoulders and gently pull the affected arm across your chest as far as comfortable, holding at the upper arm. You should feel this at the back of your shoulder. Do not pull on or press the elbow.

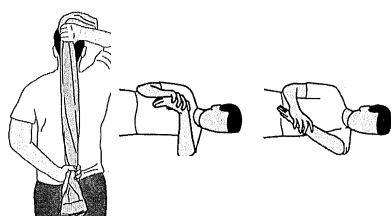


4 Passive external rotation

4 each side • hold 30 seconds, relax 30 seconds

Grasp a light stick with the affected hand and cup the other end with the opposite hand. Keep the elbow of the affected shoulder against your side and push the stick horizontally until you feel a pull without pain. You should feel this at the front and possibly back of the shoulder. Keep your hips facing forward and do not twist.

Alternative - Hold a door frame with the elbow at your side and turn your body away.



5 Passive internal rotation

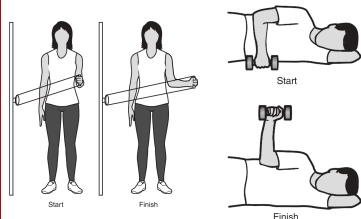
4 each side • hold 30 seconds, relax 30 seconds

Hold a light stick behind your back with the affected hand and lightly grasp the other end with the opposite hand. Pull the stick horizontally to the point of a pull without pain. You should feel this at the front and possibly back of the shoulder. Do not lean over or twist.

Alternatives - A towel behind the back, or the sleeper stretch lying on the affected side. If using the sleeper stretch, do not bend or press down on the wrist.

2 STRENGTHENING

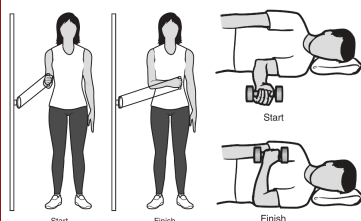
three days per week

**6 External rotation****3 sets of 8, progress to 3 sets of 12**

With a band - Anchor it at waist height, stand with the elbow at your side bent to 90 degrees and a rolled towel between the elbow and your body and rotate the forearm outward away from your stomach.

With a weight - Lie on the opposite side with the affected arm on top, elbow at your side, and lift the hand upward. Either works. You should feel this at the back of the shoulder and upper back. Squeeze the shoulder blades together as you rotate.

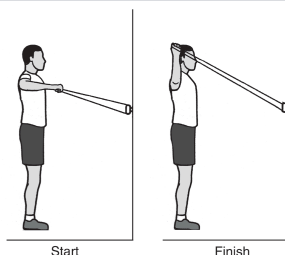
▲ **Progress** - When 3 sets of 12 feel easy and pain-free, move to the next heavier band or weight.

**7 Internal rotation****3 sets of 8, progress to 3 sets of 12**

With a band - Anchor it at waist height on the opposite side and pull the forearm across toward your stomach.

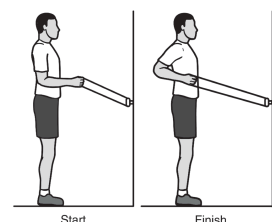
With a weight - Lie on the affected side with the elbow at your side and lift the hand up toward your stomach. You should feel this at your chest and the front of the shoulder. Keep the elbow pressed into your side.

▲ **Progress** - When 3 sets of 12 feel easy and pain-free, move to the next heavier band or weight.

**8 External rotation with the arm raised****3 sets of 8, progress to 3 sets of 12**

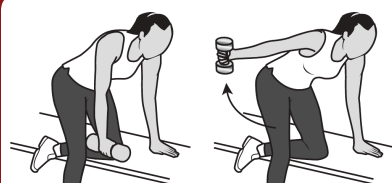
Anchor the band in front of you. Hold it with the elbow bent to 90 degrees and raised to shoulder height. Keeping the elbow in line with the shoulder, rotate the hand upward until it is level with your head, then return slowly. You should feel this at the back of the shoulder. Add this once rotation at your side is comfortable with the exercises above.

▲ **Progress** - When 3 sets of 12 feel easy and pain-free, move to the next heavier band or weight.

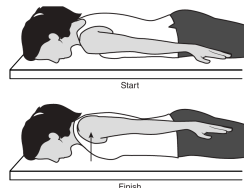
**9 Standing row****3 sets of 8, progress to 3 sets of 12**

Anchor the band in front of you at waist height. With the elbow bent and close to your side, pull the elbow straight back. You should feel this at the back of the shoulder and into the upper back. Squeeze the shoulder blades together as you pull.

▲ **Progress** - When 3 sets of 12 feel easy and pain-free, move to the next heavier band or weight.

**10 Trapezius strengthening****3 sets of 20 · 3–5 days per week**

Place one knee and hand on a bench or chair and lean forward, letting the other arm hang. Slowly raise that arm out to the side with the thumb up, stopping at shoulder height. Lower to a count of 5. Use a weight that makes the last few repetitions difficult but pain-free, then add 2 to 3 pounds at a time.

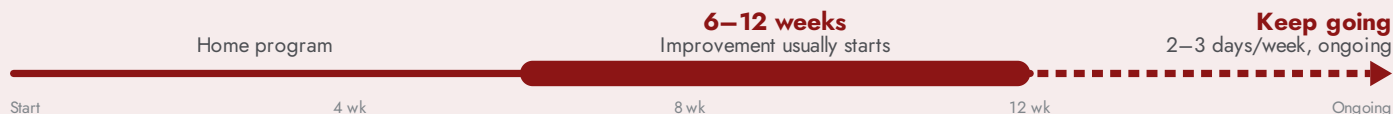
**11 Scapula setting****10 repetitions · hold 10 seconds**

Lie on your stomach with your arms at your sides and a pillow under your forehead if needed. Gently draw the shoulder blades together and down your back as far as possible, then ease about halfway off that position and hold. Do not tense your neck.

Activity

Keep using the shoulder for everyday activities within the range that is comfortable. Temporarily reduce the activities that clearly provoke pain, particularly repeated overhead reaching and heavy lifting away from the body, rather than stopping activity altogether.

What to Expect, and When to Call



This takes time and consistency. Strength builds over weeks to months, not days. Mild muscle fatigue after the exercises is expected. **Sharp pain during an exercise, or pain that lingers for hours afterward** means the resistance or the range is too much. Reduce the intensity rather than stopping the program.

Many patients notice meaningful improvement **within six to twelve weeks**. Anti-inflammatory medication or acetaminophen can help with symptoms if tolerated. Once you are feeling better, continuing these exercises two to three days per week helps protect the shoulder going forward.

Call the office if you develop new or worsening weakness, numbness in the arm or hand, or a sudden change after an injury.

Exercise Log

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Pain 0–10
1	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
2	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
3	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
4	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
5	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
6	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
7	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
8	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
9	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
10	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

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Dr. Sailesh Tummala is an orthopaedic surgeon at Stanford Health Care and a clinical assistant professor at Stanford University School of Medicine with fellowship training in sports medicine and shoulder surgery. A former collegiate basketball player, he cares for athletes and active patients of all ages and emphasizes nonoperative care while also offering minimally invasive and complex reconstructive surgery. He has authored more than 100 peer-reviewed papers and has received grant funding for his research. He assists with teams at all levels across the Bay Area, including the Stanford men's basketball and football teams.



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