

The Shoulder Rehab Blueprint

A Step-by-Step Guide to Restoring Shoulder Strength & Mobility



Phase 1: Shoulder & Thoracic Spine Mobility

Why It Matters: Shoulder mobility is heavily influenced by **thoracic spine (upper back) mobility**. If your upper back is stiff, your shoulders will compensate—leading to pain, impingements, and poor movement patterns.

Exercises to Get Started:

1 Open Book Stretch (Thoracic Rotation) [Video Link](#)

 **2 sets of 8 reps per side**

 **How to Perform:**

1. Lie on your side with knees bent at 90 degrees and arms stacked in front of you.
2. Keeping your lower body still, open your top arm across your body, rotating through your upper back.
3. Hold for a second, then return to the start.


 **Tip:** Keep your knees pressed together to prevent excessive hip movement.

2 Wall Angels [Video Link](#)

 **2 sets of 10 reps**

 **How to Perform:**

1. Stand with your back against a wall, feet 6-12 inches away, and low back in a neutral position.
2. Raise your arms to 90 degrees like a goalpost, keeping elbows and wrists in contact with the wall.
3. Slowly reach overhead while maintaining wall contact, then return.

 **Tip:** If you can't keep your elbows/wrists on the wall, limit your range of motion and work up to it.

3 Cat-Cow with Thoracic Focus [Video Link](#)

 2 sets of 8 reps

 **How to Perform:**

1. Start on all fours with hands under shoulders and knees under hips.
2. As you inhale, drop your belly and lift your chest to extend your upper back.
3. As you exhale, round your upper back by tucking your chin and pushing the floor away.

 **Tip:** Focus on **moving through the upper back** instead of excessively arching the lower back.

Phase 2: Pain-Free Strength Below Shoulder Level

Why It Matters:

Before loading overhead movements, we need to **build strength and control in pain-free positions**. Strengthening below shoulder level helps restore **stability and function** without aggravating symptoms.

Exercises to Get Started:

4 Banded External Rotations [Video Link](#)

 3 sets of 12 reps per side

 **How to Perform:**

1. Hold a resistance band at elbow height between wrists.
2. Hold the band with your elbow bent at 90 degrees, keeping it tucked at your side.
3. Rotate your arm outward, keeping your elbow stable, then return.

 **Tip:** Keep movements **slow and controlled**—don't let the band snap your arm back.

5 Scapular Rows (Low Row with Focus on Shoulder Blade Retraction)


[Video Link](#)

 3 sets of 12 reps


 **How to Perform:**

1. Using a band or cable machine, pull your hands toward your ribs, keeping elbows close to your body.
2. Focus on squeezing your **shoulder blades together** at the end of the movement.

3. Slowly return to the start position.

 **Tip: Avoid shrugging!** The movement should come from your **shoulder blades, not your traps.**

6 Farmer's Carry [Video Link](#)

 **3 sets of 20-30 seconds per side**

 **How to Perform:**

1. Hold a kettlebell or dumbbell in one hand, keeping your shoulders level.
2. Walk in a controlled manner while maintaining core engagement.
3. Switch hands and repeat.

 **Tip:** This helps **build shoulder stability and endurance** without excessive movement.

Phase 3: Strength Above Shoulder Level


Why It Matters:

Once pain-free strength has been established below shoulder level, it's time to **build confidence and control in overhead positions.**

Exercises to Get Started:

7 Landmine Press [Video Link](#)

 **3 sets of 10 reps per side**

 **How to Perform:**

1. Secure one end of a barbell in a landmine attachment or a corner.
2. Hold the other end at shoulder height with one hand, keeping your core engaged.
3. Press the bar up and slightly forward, then return.


 **Tip:** This movement allows for a **more natural overhead path** without excessive strain.

8 Overhead Carries [Video Link](#)


 **3 sets of 20-30 seconds per side**

How to Perform:

1. Hold a kettlebell or dumbbell **overhead with a straight arm**.
2. Walk slowly while keeping your core and shoulder engaged.
3. Switch hands and repeat.

 **Tip:** This builds **overhead endurance and control** while reinforcing proper scapular positioning.

9 Half-Kneeling Shoulder Press [Video Link](#)

 **3 sets of 8-10 reps per side**

How to Perform:

1. Start in a **half-kneeling position** with one knee down and the other foot forward.
2. Hold a dumbbell at shoulder height and press overhead.
3. Lower the weight with control and repeat.


 **Tip:** This position helps **improve shoulder stability and core control** while reducing compensation.

Final Thoughts: When to Seek Professional Help

These exercises are a **great starting point** for improving **shoulder mobility, strength, and stability**—but they may not **fully resolve your pain if there's an underlying issue**.

If your **shoulder pain persists, worsens, or limits daily activities**, a professional evaluation is key to identifying the **root cause** and creating a **personalized treatment plan**.

A **physical therapist** can help determine if your pain is due to **rotator cuff issues, impingements, instability, or movement dysfunctions**—and provide the best solutions tailored to you.

 **Need help?** Book a free 30 min consultation [HERE](#)
