



SELF-MANAGEMENT: PATIENT'S SECTION

Self-management of shoulder disorders—Part 2[☆]

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Stretching and strengthening the shoulder

Shoulder disorders such as tendinitis of the rotator cuff or biceps tendon, frozen shoulder, or instability (SLAP tears) are very common. Each of these conditions requires a step-by-step self-care prescription guided by a rehabilitation specialist.

The first stage of training involves low-load sparing and stabilizing exercises. This article will review stage two intermediate load exercises to improve the stability of your shoulder. For each exercise perform 8–10 repetitions, slowly, twice a day.

Wall wash

Purpose:

This is an important exercise to train fine motor control and coordination of the correct shoulder blade position on your back to help you avoid shrugging your shoulder(s) upwards.

Starting position:

- Stand in a semi-squat position or “fencers” posture at a slight angle to a nearby wall.
- Place the palm of one hand on the wall.

- Ensure that your elbow is below shoulder height and your hand is starting at shoulder height.

Exercise:

- Without moving your hand or arm shrug your shoulder up and then depress it down your back.
- Once you have developed this skill maintain your shoulder blade depressed down your back—scapular setting.
- With the shoulder blade or scapula set down and back slide your palm on the wall as if washing it (see Fig. 1).
- Bend your knees and use your whole body during the exercise.
- Once you are comfortable with this motion try it from a different starting position with your hand across your body (see Fig. 2).

Fine tuning:

- Always maintain a semi-squat position with chest up and shoulders back.
- Maintain the scapular setting position—down and back.
- Use a towel between your hand and the wall if your hand is not sliding easily.

Pull downs

Purpose:

This is an important exercise to improve posture so that your shoulder(s) is not rounded forward or shrugged up.

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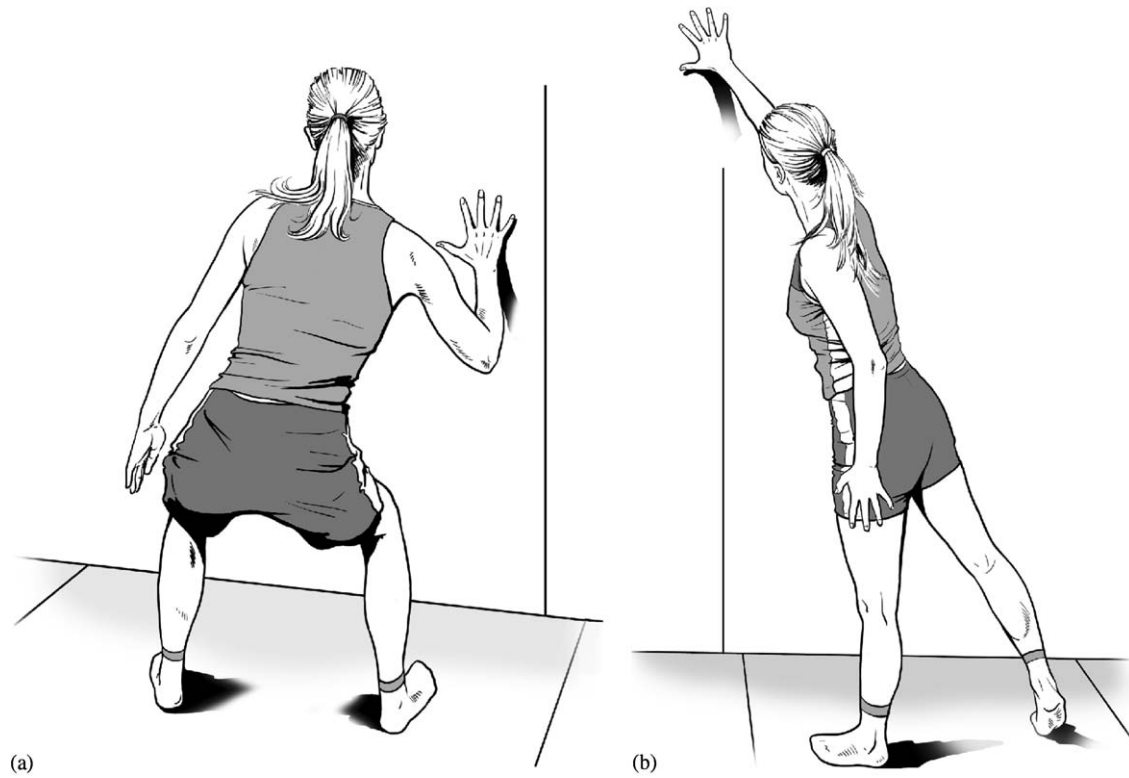


Figure 1 Wall wash-push: (a) start position and (b) end position.

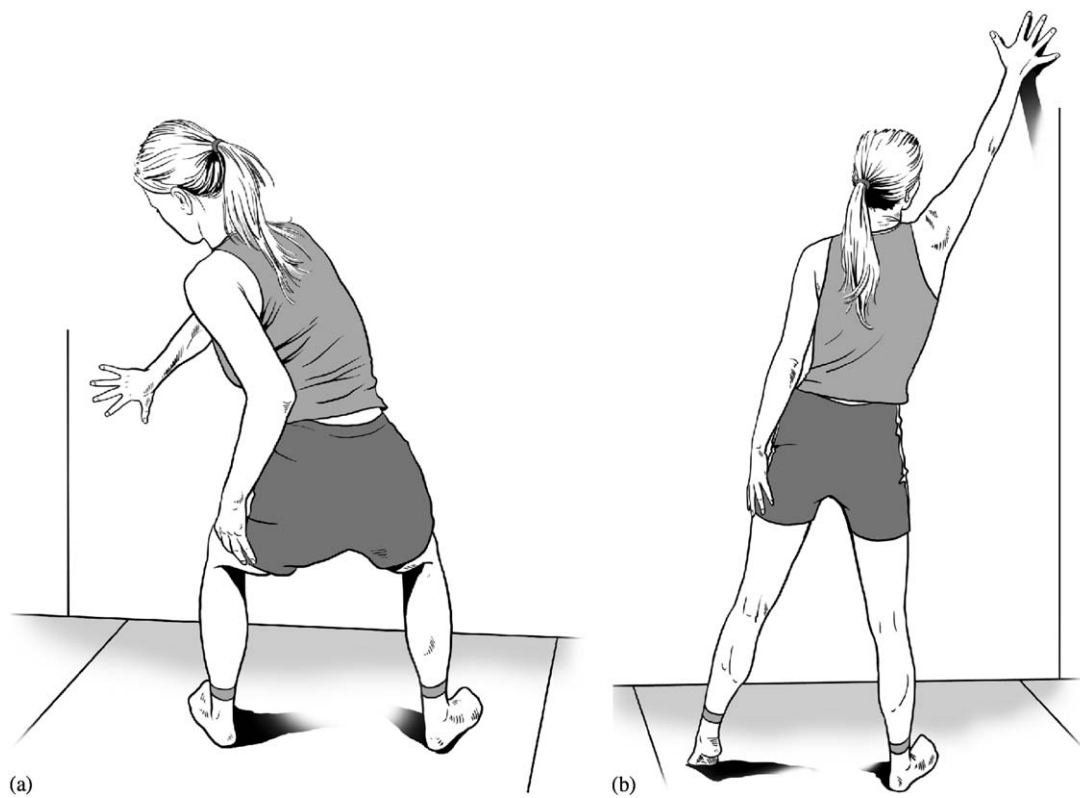


Figure 2 Wall wash-pull: (a) start position and (b) end position.

Starting position:

- Stand facing a pulley anchor or cable machine.
- Grasp the handle above you so that your arm is overhead, stand far enough away so that there is tension on the tubing/cable with an outstretched arm.
- Assume a “fencer’s posture” or slight lunge position with one foot in front of the other and chest up/shoulders back (the rear leg should be on the same side as the hand grasping the pulley).

Exercise:

- Begin by performing scapular setting—depress your shoulder blade down and back (see Fig. 3).
- Then allow the tension of the cable to pull your arm out of the scapular setting position (shoulder shrugged up and stretched out) (see Fig. 3a).
- Perform the scapular setting movement again against the resistance of the cable (see Fig. 3b).
- Then while maintaining the scapula down and back perform short-range straight arm pull-downs.

Fine tuning:

- If it is difficult to avoid shoulder shrugging, experiment with different heights for the anchor (just above shoulder height is often the easiest).
- Progress the exercise by letting your elbow bend and bringing your arm all the way back and down (see Fig. 4). Be sure to maintain the scapular setting position (down and back).
- The most important error to avoid with this exercise is shoulder shrugging (see Fig. 5).
- Try this same exercise from a kneeling position.

Posterior capsule stretch*Purpose:*

This is an important exercise to improve posture so that your shoulder(s) is not rounded forward.

Starting position:

- Lying on your side with arm at shoulder height, elbow bent 90° and arm turned in.

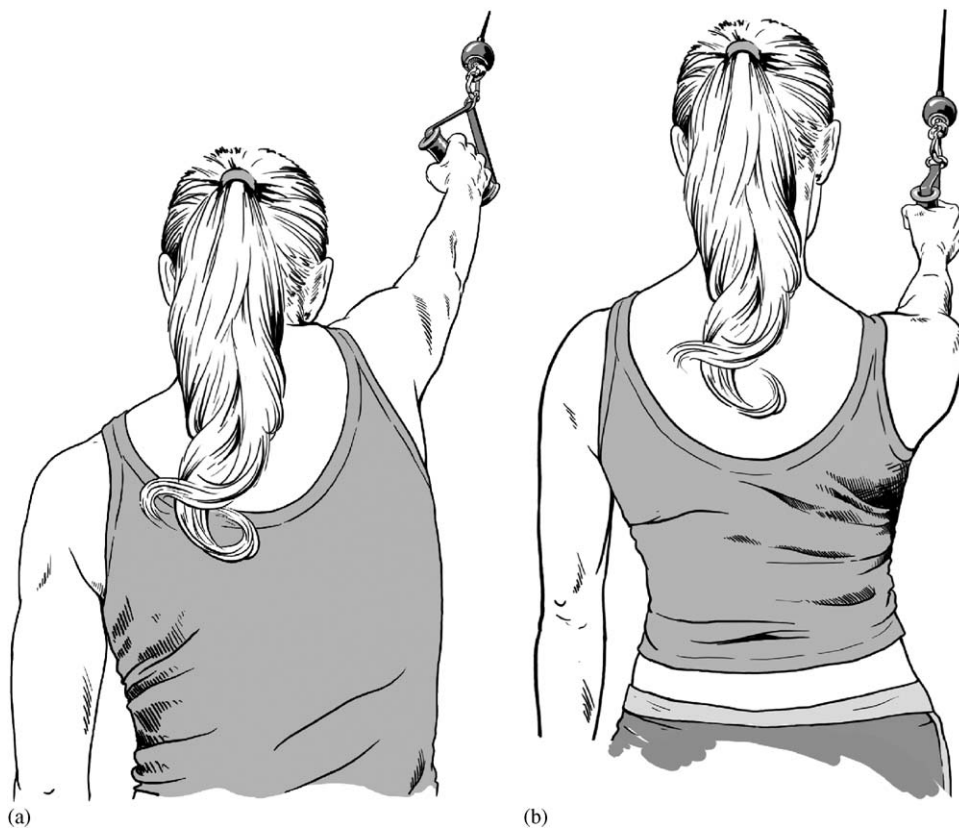


Figure 3 Scapular setting: (a) shrug shoulder and (b) depress shoulder.

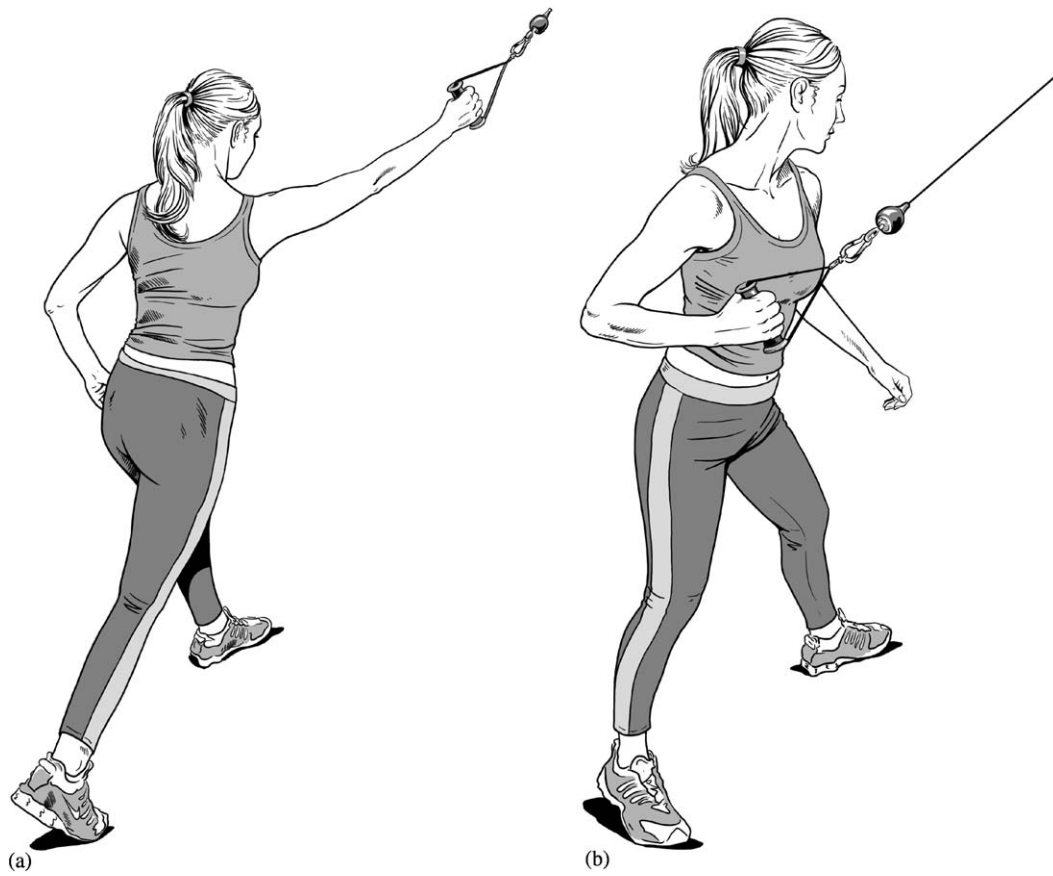


Figure 4 Pull down: (a) start position and (b) end position.

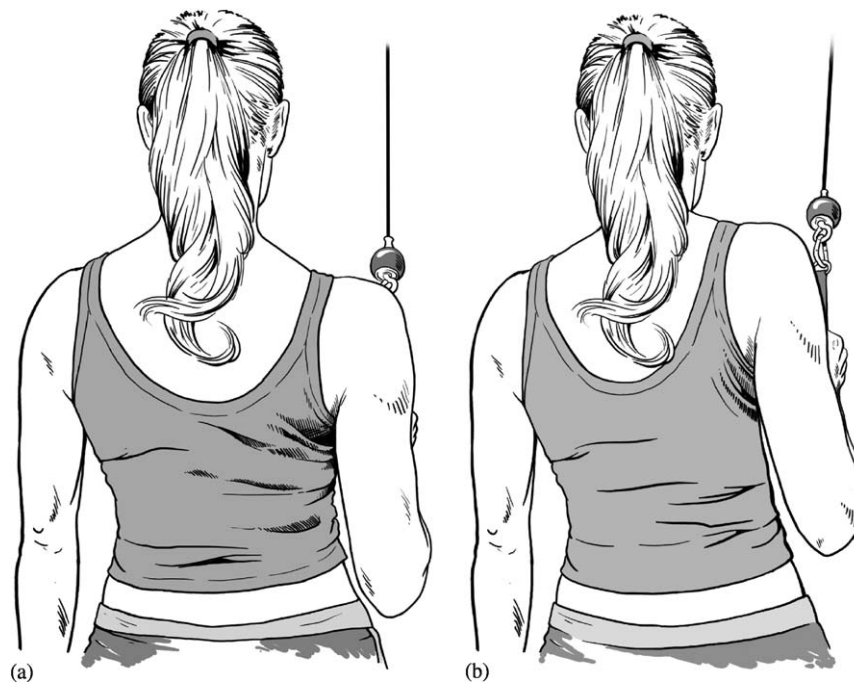


Figure 5 Shoulder blade position: (a) correct and (b) incorrect.



Figure 6 Posterior capsule stretch: (a) start position and (b) end position (reproduced with permission from C. DeFranca, C.S. Liebenson, *The Upper Body Book*, The Gym Ball Store, 2001).

Exercise:

- Hold your arm turned in and slowly roll your chest/torso forward.
- A stretch should be felt in the back of the shoulder not the front (Fig. 6).
- Slowly rock over your shoulder repeatedly.

Fine tuning:

- If it is hard to isolate the stretch to the back of the shoulder try to lower your arm towards your side, then turn it in more and roll farther forward over it.

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