

Q: Recently I've noticed that I have shoulder pain after some of our "advanced basics" training sessions. I've never had pain with blocks before, what's going on?

The shoulder is one of the most elegant & highly mobile joints in the human body. Unlike the knee joint which primarily acts as a hinge-type joint, the shoulder is a ball & socket that can move in all directions. Due to its extreme mobility, the shoulder is particularly vulnerable to even a little weakness.... and weakness at the shoulder typically translates into pain, often noticeable w/ karate blocks, push ups, or weapons kata.

The rotator cuff is a collection of 4 muscles that wrap around the shoulder like a cuff and rotate the arm, hence "rotator cuff". They, along with the scapular stabilizers are key to healthy shoulder function. The following exercise works several of the rotator cuff muscles and as a bonus also several scapular stabilizers. Try the following exercise: Lie face down, with your entire shoulder & arm dangling over the edge of the bed (Figure A.)

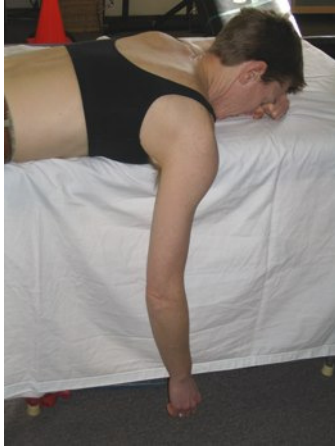


Figure A

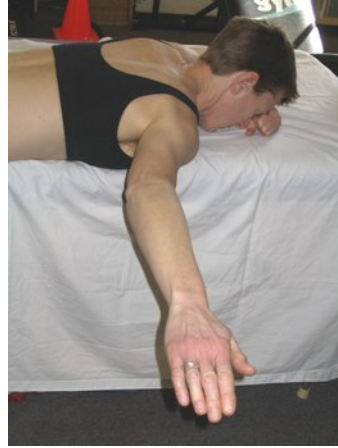


Figure B

Now raise your arm to the side (90 degrees to your body), knuckles up towards ceiling, so your arm is the same height as your body & hold 3 seconds (Figure B.) Mental focus should be on lifting your arm, while simultaneously pinching your shoulder blade together & downwards. This exercise can be freakishly hard, so start without any weight, moving slow & controlled. How many can you do before you get to fatigue or you lose good form? If you can do 20, you're ready to add ½ to 1 lb. Remember, if you have pain, listen to it! and consult with your healthcare provider. It's not a good idea to work through pain.