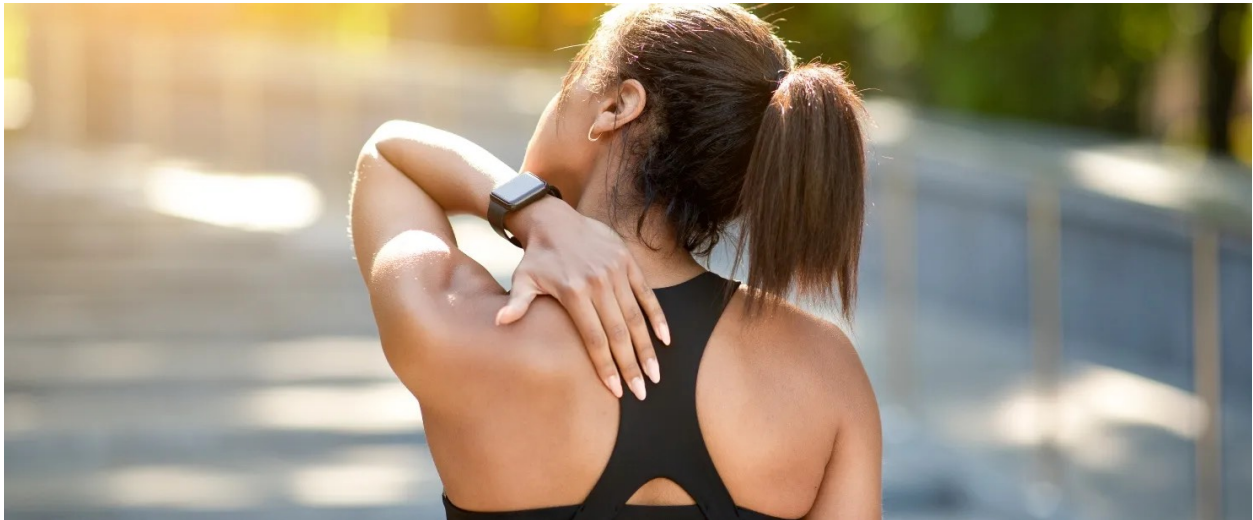


7 Ways To Relieve Your Tight Shoulders



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by Brittany Anas

Tight shoulders are a pretty common complaint these days, which isn't all that surprising considering [rising rates of stress](#) and other factors related to our modern lifestyle. From a physiological standpoint, shoulders (and really all body parts in general) tighten up when you remain in a fixed position for too long, says physical therapist and pain specialist Tawny Kross, D.P.T., of [Kross Centered Care](#). Hunching over a computer for 40-plus hours a week is pretty much guaranteed to take a toll on your shoulders.

And back to stress—it really does your muscles a world of evil. “Stress puts our body in a fight-or-flight state, which causes

muscles to brace and tense to better help us ‘run away’ or ‘fight’ the threat,” Kross explains. “The body is designed to be able to move in and out of fight-or-flight, but chronic stress can cause muscular tension to persist, leading to chronically tight shoulders.”

Ever hear the phrase “carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders”? Well, it makes a whole lot of sense now, doesn’t it? If you’re ready to loosen up, here are seven expert tricks.

1. Stretch It Out

Stretching throughout the day can help relieve tension in your shoulders, says Lalitha McSorely, lead physical therapist at [Brentwood Physiotherapy Calgary](#). Four of her favorite shoulder stretches include:

- *Neck Rolls:* Gently roll your neck in circles, clockwise and counterclockwise, to help release tension. Do this for about one to two minutes in each direction.
- *Doorway Stretch:* Stand in a doorway with your arms bent to 90 degrees so that your forearms rest on the doorframe. Keeping your arms and shoulders relaxed, step forward, allowing your chest to stretch through the doorway. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds.
- *Eagle Arms:* Sit or stand tall and bring your right arm under your left, crossing them at the elbows. If possible, entwine your forearms and bring your palms to touch. Lift your elbows to shoulder height and draw your shoulder blades down and away from your ears. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, then switch sides.
- *Levator Scapulae Stretch:* Sit or stand tall and tilt your left ear toward your left shoulder. Place your left hand on the top

of your head and gently pull your head towards your left shoulder, feeling a stretch in the right side of your neck and shoulder. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, then switch sides.

2. Improve Your Posture

If you log lots of hours at a desk, it's time to start paying more attention to your posture. "Sit up straight, engage your core, and avoid slouching to prevent unnecessary strain on the shoulders," says McSorely. (Write these cues on a Post-it note and slap it onto your computer monitor as a constant reminder.)

Read More: [5 Exercises That'll Help Improve Your Posture](#)

Also, take regular breaks from sitting in the same position, suggests Nathan Kadlecsek, P.T., D.P.T., of [Kadalyst Wellness and Physical Therapy](#). If possible, stand up, walk around, and stretch every 30 to 60 minutes, he recommends.

3. Give Yourself A Massage

Sure, booking yourself a massage appointment is a worthwhile treat that can help relax tense shoulders, but you can also help release your muscles at home with a couple of simple tools.

Use a massage ball or foam roller before bed to gently roll out any particularly tense points in your shoulder muscles before bed to help ease stiffness caused by knots or trigger points, advises McSorely. To get started, roll back and forth across your upper back or shoulders a few times until you [find a spot that feels particularly sticky or tense](#). Rest on that spot for 30 seconds or

until you start to feel tension fade. Then, roll back and forth in a new direction and repeat the process. Of course, you can also always ask a partner, friend, or family member to knead your scrunchy shoulders after a long day!

4. Stay Hydrated

Proper [hydration](#) has a million and one benefits—and muscle health is one of them. Drinking plenty of water keeps your muscles hydrated and functioning optimally, Kadlecek says. Meanwhile, if you are under-hydrated, it's possible you may experience more cramping and tightness due to electrolyte imbalances. Wondering [how much water you should be drinking?](#) A good rule of thumb is to start with half of your body weight in ounces of water. So, if you weigh 150 pounds, aim to sip down 75 ounces of water a day. Just know that if you exercise a lot or live in a hot climate (read: get sweaty often), you'll need to up your intake beyond that baseline. (Adding a [drink mix formulated to support hydration](#) can help you get the most out of your H₂O.)

5. Try Heat Therapy

When tight shoulders are really bothering you, a little heat can go a long way. Apply a warm compress or heating pad to your shoulders for 15 to 20 minutes to help relax the muscles and increase blood flow, Kadlecek suggests. Ideally, you'd do this anytime you're feeling tense and are able; however, it's also a nice way to wind down at night before bed, he says.

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You can also hop into a hot bath with some [Epsom salt](#) and a few drops of [essential oils](#) like [frankincense](#) or [eucalyptus](#), suggests doctor of acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Stace Nelson-Hicks, D.A.C.M., L.Ac., C.F.M.P., of [Elixir Lifestyle Medicine](#). (Epsom salt [contains a form of magnesium](#) that can help ease your mind and your muscles.) Once out of the tub, you can continue to give your shoulders some TLC with a heating pad or warm compress.

6. Try Acupuncture

If your shoulder tension is really dragging you down, consider seeing a licensed acupuncturist for support. Typically in a session, Nelson-Hicks needles into the restricted areas using orthopedic acupuncture or dry needling techniques, places an infrared lamp over the tightest spots, and applies cups to the shoulder and surrounding muscles that are tight and sore, such as the trapezius, deltoids, rhomboids, infraspinatus, and supraspinatus.

“There’s an old adage in Traditional Chinese Medicine that for every year you’ve had the injury or issue, that’s how many months it could take to heal,” she says. Generally, she’ll see patients once or twice a week to gauge their range of motion and pain levels and determine the full course of treatment.

7. Build Strength

Including shoulder-strengthening exercises in your fitness routine can lessen the impact of tight shoulders over time. Dumbbell

lateral raises and rows can help improve shoulder stability and ultimately help prevent tightness, McSorely says. Make sure your strength-training program, however it's broken down, gives your shoulders some much-deserved attention. Not sure where to start? Check out these five [moves for sculpted shoulders](#).