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# SHOULDER STRETCHES

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*Created by BackTalkSSG (Lauren Leopold, OTDS)*



## Things to consider

**Disclaimer:** The following stretches are not scoliosis specific but are stretches that I have found I can still perform despite my scoliosis. These stretches work for myself and my body but please keep in mind that everyone is different; what works for myself may or may not work for you. When starting a new routine, it is advised to consult with your healthcare provider.

### **How many should I do?**

When beginning these stretches, hold the stretch for 5-10 seconds on each side. In the beginning, you may want to start with 1-2 sets to make sure they do not aggravate your muscles or increase pain. As your muscles loosen and you become more comfortable with the stretches, you can increase the amount of time you hold the stretch (15-30 seconds) and/or the amount of sets you perform (3-5 sets). If pain increases, stop the stretch immediately and consult your healthcare provider.

When performing stretches, it is important to maintain proper positioning during the stretch. Most of the following stretches can be performed standing or sitting with your back straight and shoulders relaxed (shoulders should be down, not shrugged up towards your ears).

In addition, remember to continue to breathe through the stretch and do not hold your breath (some people do this unconsciously). Your breathing should be slow and steady; breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth while performing the stretch.

## Wall stretch

Stand beside a wall so that your right shoulder is about a foot away from the wall.

Make sure your back is straight and your shoulders are relaxed. Reach your right arm behind you and place your hand on the wall making sure that your arm is in line with your shoulder (if you cannot reach your arm to shoulder level that is okay, but make sure it does not go above shoulder level). To feel a deeper stretch, take a step closer to the wall or slightly rotate your chest to the left side.

Hold for 5-30 seconds, switch sides and repeat 3-5 times each side. You will feel this stretch along the front of your shoulders as well as your chest.



## Cross arm stretch

Begin standing or sitting with your back straight and shoulders relaxed. Place your right arm in front of your chest and bring it across your body as far as you can comfortably. Lightly place your left hand along your elbow or upper arm to gently pull your right arm closer to your chest. Hold for 5-30 seconds and repeat on the other side.

You should feel this stretch along the top/back of your shoulder.



## Bent arm shoulder stretch

Begin standing or sitting with your back straight and shoulders relaxed. Place your right arm in front of your chest and bring it across your body, bend your arm to a 90 degree angle, your fingers should now be pointing up. Place the inside of your left elbow below your right elbow and gently pull towards your left shoulder. You should feel this stretch along your right shoulder. Return to starting position and repeat on the other side.



## Elbow out rotator stretch

Begin by standing or sitting with your back straight and shoulders relaxed. Place your right hand on your low to middle back with the palm facing out. Reach across your body with your left arm and grab your right arm around the bicep or elbow area. Using your left hand, gently pull your right arm/shoulder forward. Hold for 5-30 seconds and repeat on the other side. You should feel this stretch around the back of your shoulder/shoulder blade area.





## Thread the needle stretch

Begin this position in all 4's on the floor (preferably with a mat or towel under your knees for comfort) or on your bed. Knees should be hip-width apart and wrists directly under the shoulders. Reach your right arm underneath your body and reach across as far as you can without discomfort. As you reach, your left elbow should bend and your head should follow your right arm (do not keep your head looking forward or down, make sure it follows the movement). Hold for a few seconds, return to starting position and repeat on the other side. You should feel this stretch along the back of your right shoulder.



## Corner stretch

Begin by standing with your back towards a corner. Bring both arms up to shoulder height so your elbows are barely touching the wall and your hands are in front of your chest. Use both elbows to push against the wall so you push yourself forward away from the wall. Hold this position for 5-10 seconds, return to starting position and repeat 3-5 times.





## T-spine windmill stretch

Begin this position in all 4's on the floor (preferably with a mat or towel under your knees for comfort) or on your bed. Knees should be hip-width apart and wrists directly under the shoulders. Reach your right arm underneath your body and reach across as far as you can without discomfort. As you reach, your left elbow should bend and your head should follow your right arm (do not keep your head looking forward or down, make sure it follows the movement). Hold for a few seconds, return to starting position and repeat on the other side. You should feel this stretch along the back of your right shoulder.



## Behind the head stretch

Begin by standing or sitting with your back straight and shoulders relaxed. Bring your right arm up and over your head so your elbow is bent and your hand lies behind your head/neck. Next, grab your right elbow with your left hand and gently pull on your elbow so your hand slightly slides further down your head/back. Hold for 5-30 seconds, return to starting position, and repeat on the other side. You should feel this stretch along the shoulder of the arm that is bent behind you.



## Towel stretches

Towel stretch 1: Begin by standing tall with a straight back and relaxed shoulders. Grab a rolled-up towel and hold with one hand. With your opposite hand, reach behind your back and grab the other end of the towel so you are now holding the towel behind you. Slowly lift your arms up until you feel a comfortable stretch. Hold for 5-30 seconds, return to starting position, and repeat 3-5 times. You should feel this stretch along the front and back of your shoulders.

Modification: This stretch can also be performed without a towel. Bring both arms behind your back and interlace your fingers together. Slowly push your arms up until you feel a slight but comfortable stretch in your chest and front of your shoulders. Hold for 10-30 seconds, release, and return to starting position. Repeat 2-5 times.

Towel stretch 2: Begin by standing tall with a straight back and relaxed shoulders. Hold one end of the towel in your right hand and bring it over and behind your head. Grab the other end of the towel with your left hand. Gently use your right hand to pull the towel toward the ceiling. Hold for 5-30 seconds, switch hands and repeat, and repeat this sequence 3-5 times. You should feel this stretch along the front of your shoulders.



## References

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