



Shoulder Exercises for Swimmers

Increase strength and mobility in your shoulders for improved performance

Many swimmers have missed some amount of time away from the water due to some type of shoulder injury, either minor or severe. Some shoulders are too tight and others aren't strong or stable enough. Swimmers need shoulders that have:

1. Mobility: the ability to move through an optimal range of motion
2. Stability: the ability to produce and absorb force through a joint

Depending upon your training history and whether or not you've had injuries, you might need more mobility, stability, or both. Here are some quick self-tests to find out which exercises will help you more.

Remember, a key defense against shoulder injuries is [perfecting your technique](#).

Mobility

Raise one arm above your head and bend your elbow, pointing your hand down the middle of your back. Bend the other arm behind the middle of your back and try to touch the other hand. If you can't touch your hands together in this position, you might be able to make some mobility gains in your shoulder joints.

[These shoulder mobility exercises](#) might help improve the range of motion available in your shoulders. Throughout all of these exercises, make sure you breathe and can

smile—if you can't, then it's too intense and you need to back off. Your body will only make lasting changes that it's comfortable with and your facial expression and breathing are strong indicators of this.

- **Shoulder mobility + tennis ball:** This can be uncomfortable at first, but over time it really helps to open up the shoulder joint. Lie on your back and place a tennis ball between your spine and scapula with your palm up and arm on the floor. Bring the arm across your body toward the opposite hip and bring it back up overhead in a diagonal motion. You can also take your arm across your body, then bring it up overhead, and then return it to your side in a snow angel motion.
- **T-spine mobility + double tennis ball:** Lying on your back place two tennis balls (either taped together or in a tied-off sock) at the bottom of your spine where your ribs connect. Perform a quarter sit-up movement a few times and then slide the balls up one vertebra. Perform the same sit-up movement on this vertebra and then scoot up to the next one. Continue until you've reached where your shoulder meets your spine. Focus on the mid-back and not the lower back or neck for this exercise.
- **Seated wall angel knees bent:** Sit on the floor with your back upright against a wall. Place your forearms and elbows against the wall. Squeeze your shoulder blades together and while holding them tight, move your arms up and down the wall as long as you can keep contact with the wall and your elbows.
- **Wind-up stretch:** With one hand, grab onto something solid that's about your height. Swing your leg (the one on the same side as the arm that's holding onto the wall, chair, or whatever stable item you're using for support) around behind you and lean toward that side with your torso. You should feel a stretch along your back and lats.

Strength

Are you able to do five pull-ups with full extension without kicking to get over the bar? If you can't, then you can make some gains in strength to stabilize your

shoulders.

Try these [shoulder strengthening exercises](#) to help improve strength in your shoulders.

- **Batwing + Dumbbell:** Lying face down on a bench, grab a dumbbell in each hand and pull your hands to your arm pits. Squeeze and hold your shoulder blades together with your elbows as high as possible for about 5 seconds.
- **Waiter carry + Dumbbell:** Lift a weight overhead and hold your shoulder so that it's "sunk into" your socket as opposed to you lifting your shoulder up and out of the socket. Walk as slowly as possible while maintaining control of the weight and your arm.
- **Kneeling single-arm press + Dumbbell:** Kneeling on one knee and with the same side arm, press a weight overhead. Keep in mind how wide you place the foot of the bent leg on the floor from the kneeling knee; the smaller your base of support, the harder this exercise will be. The wider out you put your front foot, the easier it will be.
- **Pull-up:** Grasp the pull up bar and start fully extended and pull yourself up until at least your chin, neck, or even chest reaches above the bar height. Lower to full extension.

If you're unable to do any pull-ups, read [Pull-Ups Are Possible](#), where you'll find an exercise progression to get you to your first pull-up.

Seek the advice of a qualified trainer for help performing shoulder exercises. If you are already experiencing shoulder problems, consult your medical professional before starting a new exercise regimen.

Having strong and mobile shoulders can help swimmers find more success and longevity in the pool.

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