



**Richard Michelin, DO**  
**Shoulder and Elbow Specialist**  
**Lasvegasshoulderelbow.com**  
**Crovettiortho.com**

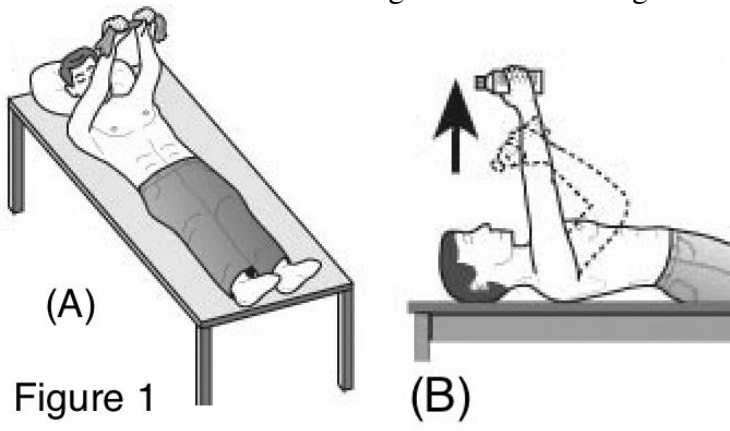


## **EXERCISE PROGRAM FOR THE WEAK SHOULDER** **(Adapted from the University of Washington Shoulder Service)**

The strength of your shoulder depends on the coordinated working of several groups of muscles, including the muscles of the rotator cuff, the deltoid and pectoralis major, and the muscles that power the shoulder blade. The simple exercises described here are designed to help you optimize the strength and coordination of these muscle groups.

The primary exercise is called the progressive supine press (Fig. 1). It is most effective for helping you regain the ability to use your arm in an elevated position. The nice thing about this exercise is that you can do it by yourself and can adjust your rate of progress according to what is most comfortable for you. The exercise proceeds in small steps. In the first stage you simply push your hand up toward the ceiling.

Start by lying on your back, grasping a washcloth with both hands together (A). Push the cloth straight up toward the ceiling. At the end of each push, lift your entire shoulder off the bed or floor. When you can do this 20 times easily, separate your hands an inch or so when you push the cloth toward the ceiling. This places slightly more of the load on the muscles of your weaker shoulder. As the exercise gets easier, separate your hands more on the washcloth until you can push your hand toward the ceiling without any assistance from the opposite arm. Practice this exercise with nothing in your hand until you are able to repeat it 20 times. Then take an empty pint container and perform the same movement, pushing it toward the ceiling (B). Add water to increase the resistance slowly. When the container is full of water, the weight is about one pound. Make sure that with each press-up you end by lifting your shoulder blade up off the bed or floor. We call this the “press plus.” Be sure that you can perform the movement comfortably 20 times at each stage before advancing to the next stage.



When you press one pound toward the ceiling 20 times, the next step is to perform the exercise with your back propped up slightly on pillows or by using a recliner or garden chair (C). When 20 comfortable repetitions are possible, increase the degree to which your back is propped up. At each level push the shoulder all the way up (press plus). Continue this process until you are able to push the one pound weight 20 times toward the ceiling in a sitting position or upright standing position. Work for smooth, slow, controlled motion. This program optimizes the mechanics of your shoulder and gives you the best chance of regaining good function.

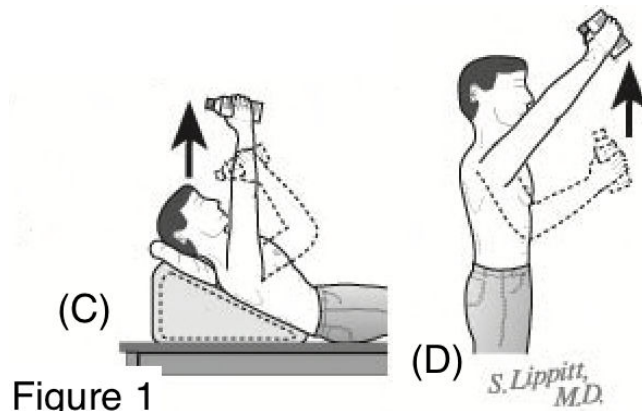


Figure 1

The second exercise is the shoulder shrug (Fig. 2). The trapezius is strengthened by shoulder shrugs made with the arms holding some weight at the side. As with the supine press, you should begin with a light weight (a soup can, for instance) and progress when you can perform 20 shrugs comfortably. For balance purposes, this exercise should be performed with both arms at the same time.

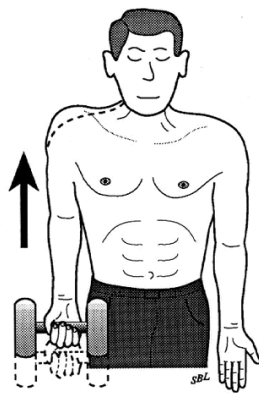
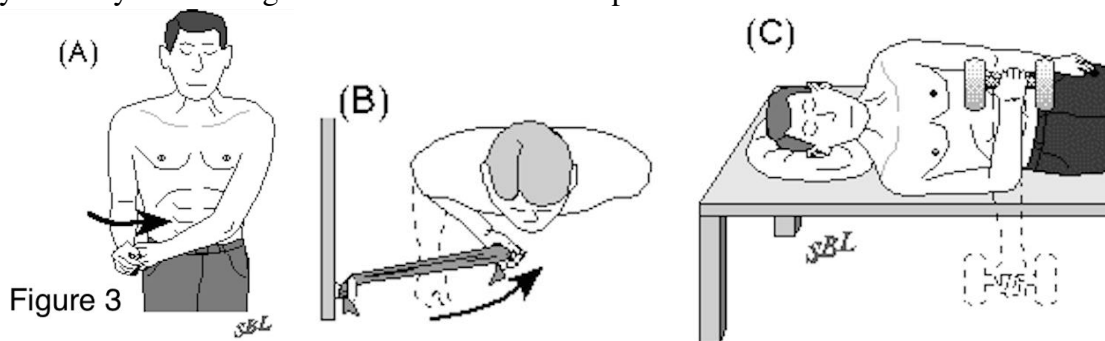


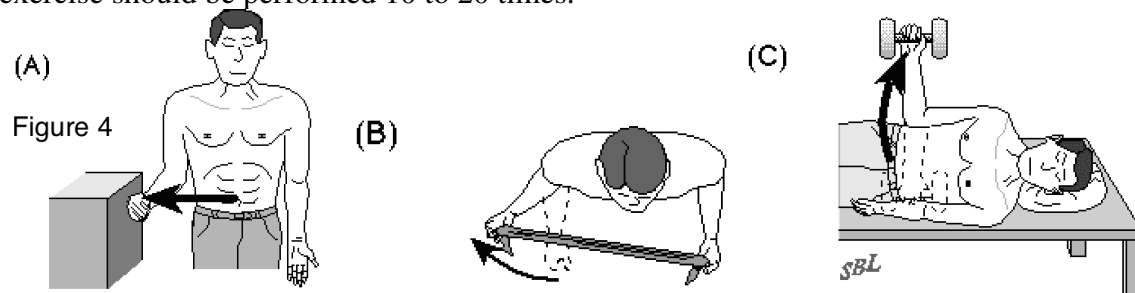
Figure 2

The final sets of exercises are strengthening of the internal and external rotators of the shoulder. These muscles can be strengthened with isometric exercises, rubber tubing (theraband) or weights. As with supine press and shoulder shrug we begin gently, with isometrics and light rubber tubing and then progress.

Internal rotation is turning the entire arm toward the body (Fig. 3). During isometrics (A), simulate turning your arm inwards while resisting the motion with your opposite hand. When using the rubber tubing (B), attach one end of the theraband to a door knob. With your affected shoulder towards the door, hold the other end of the tubing and turn your arm inwards against the resistance of the tubing. When using weight (C), lie on the side of your affected shoulder and turn your arm inwards, towards your body and ceiling. This exercise should be performed 10 to 20 times.



External rotation is turning the entire arm away from the body (Fig. 4). The exercise begins with the elbow at the side and the arm pointed straight ahead. During isometrics (A) simulate turning your arm outwards while resisting the motion with your opposite hand. Concentrate on keeping your elbow at your side. When using the rubber tubing (B), attach one of the ends to a door knob. With your opposite shoulder towards the door hold the other end of the tubing and turn your arm outwards against the resistance of the tubing. Again be sure to keep your elbow at your side. When using weights (C) lie on the side of your opposite shoulder and turn your arm outwards toward the ceiling. This exercise should be performed 10 to 20 times.



The entire exercise program should be performed 2-3 times per day. Most patients begin to experience benefit within 6 weeks. Once you have achieved significant improvement,

the frequency of the exercise program can be decreased. Often the program needs to be continued daily or every other day in order to prophylax against recurrences of pain and weakness.

General shoulder strengthening exercises such as swimming, light resistance rowing machine, cross-country ski simulators and brisk walking are excellent for this purpose and also help coordination, endurance and general well-being. Make sure that these exercises are performed with your affected shoulder in an un-elevated position or with your hand always below the level of your shoulder.

Remember a single piece of band can progress your exercises by applying more tension slowly by stepping further away, shortening the band or doubling up the band. Make sure you are consistent with the tension you are applying each time.