Scapulasaurus

## What’s the issue?

This issue revolves around the stabilizing and maintaining that stabilization of the scapula throughout shoulder focused movement patterns. Many are unaware of their scapular lifting off of the back as they make the descent portion of a push-up, many are unaware of when their shoulder blades start looking like a stegosaurus while strenuously holding that straight arm plank. With many of the people we have worked with, we typically have noticed that this lack of scapular control tends to be a rather larger limiter in push up progression as well as progression through movement patterns that are shoulder reliant. When the scapula are not held by the wonderful supporting cast (rhomboids, trapezious muscles, infraspinatus, supraspinatus, teres minor, subscapularus) typically limits the range of motion of the movement or increases the chances of injury. We typically want to work within the full range of motion of a joint so that we are maintaining the correct muscle balance, preventing improper posture due to muscle imbalances, as well as effectively working to engage as much of the muscle as possible. When our scapulas start winging, we lose a substantial amount of stability through the upper body. Let’s get into the nitty and gritty; time to nerd out with some Kinistheseology.

### Common behaviors that lead to this issue

**Plank held too long**

A plank should not be held for longer than 90 seconds; the focus of the exercise is on taxing the multiple layers of the core while keeping the back/hips properly engaged. If your core is not tired within 90 seconds, you are either practicing poor form or need to progress to a harder variation of the plank.

**Attempting too challenging of a push-up**

If your scapulas flare off of your back while you do your pushups, either you are not paying attention to your form (oops!) or the movement is too challenging. As trainers, we typically see a combination of both. Solution? Perform pushups off an elevated surface, focusing on full range of motion. Start simple and practice proper form!

**Not mindful of form/unaware of proper form**

Many have a fear of asking for help, especially when it comes to using our own bodies. Ask! There is no such thing as dumb questions within fitness; if you are curious ask around and please use multiple sources. There are a wide variety of resources available to assist you in learning proper form (I know such a good plug for myself!).

**Using too much weight**

This is the most common cause of scapular winging in trained individuals. If your scapulas flare off your back when doing cable chest press, then you are lifting too much. If your scapulas flare when bench pressing, you are doing too much! If your scapula flares…I think you get the drift. Why am I berating you with this tidbit? Armor never breaks at the strongest point. The weakest part of you should dictate the weight you lift. It won’t be the chest muscle you pull when completing these reps, but rather one of the dozen stabilizing muscles.

# Why is Scapulasaurus an issue?

**Improper Activation/stabilization**

When the scapula wings from the back we typically see a few things going “wrong” that cause this deviation in form. Often, one activates and stabilizes the wrong muscles causing the scapulas to not be held flat against the back as desired. When this occurs, we typically see the range of motion of the exercise limited by the mechanics of the joints as well as the physiology of the body. When the scapulas are not held by stabilizing muscles, unnecessary stress is placed on the stabilizing muscles to be the primary movers of the movement. These muscles are small and typically are too weak to work as the primary muscles of a movement, however, with scapular winging, the body attempts to make these muscles do that heavy lifting. Ever feel like you are stuck in the pushup position? This is because stabilizing muscles are attempting to lift you back up, instead of those lovely primary movers (triceps, deltoids). In addition to the movement being halted/limited, the loss of form drastically increases chances of injury throughout the shoulder region as well as in muscle groups not relating to the movement entirely.

**Progression to more advanced, complex movements inhibited**

This may not seem like an issue, but the lack of progression to complex movement patterns is a rather common occurrence within the fitness realm. Typically we see progress measured by how many reps as well as how much weight an individual can lift and very rarely do we focus on movement patterns and progressing to more difficult movements. Let’s use a little scenario that I see far too often at the gym. Many fitness oriented (my polite way of saying those who PICK THINGS UP AND PUT THEM DOWN) males find pushups to be easy and pedantic and you rarely see them completing pushups as the main exercise and typically used as a burnout for bench press or dumbbell flies. Rarely will you see someone attempt pushups with one leg off the ground, or working to progress to one arm pushup, which would in turn work far more muscles as the complexity of the movement requires more muscles to be engaged, which would greatly increase the efficacy of their workout as well as the effects of the burnout. But I digress…

If the scapulas flare from the back, one is less likely or unable to develop the proper muscle control to complete shoulder oriented movements. Without proper activation/deactivation of the shoulder girdle in conjunction with back muscles, the body is able to cheat the motion and shift the work to the incorrect muscles. This can occur for a variety of reasons and being aware of these issues is paramount to improving your performance and saving your joints from unnecessary pain.

**How to go about rectifying this situation?**

The biggest guidance I can provide my clients is the understanding that self awareness is key to your success within fitness. When at the gym, use mirrors to assist you in feeling where you brain thinks your body is located and actuality. Literally check each and every rep to insure you are practicing proper form. With practice, your body will adopt this proper form and holding good form will become like walking, an easy task for you to complete. In addition, be attentive to your form when you become tired during your workout. We all cheat differently; learn how your body specifically cheats and use that to your advantage! Find yourself dropping your butt when you get tired while performing planks? Start with the butt slightly more elevated so that when you become tired you will drop into that good form!

Form follows function; practice poor form and you will have piss poor form. Instead of working to arbitrary repetition values, pay attention to when you get tired and when you form fails and stop when that occurs. By stopping early, you help prevent the body from learning poor habits and adopting “cheats” to the form that may not be conducive. Learn to pay attention to your body’s cues of being tired and to correct your form and then attempt more. Please do not feel discouraged if this means you are only complete a few repetitions. We all start somewhere and we all started at zero at one point in time. The focus isn’t how many you did, but rather that you did make the effort and focused on improving yourself.

Here are a few exercises that assist in building a stronger shoulder girdle and help instill better form concerning your shoulder stability.

* Help, Help!
* Elevated Push-ups
* Straight Arm Plank
* Tummy Taps
* Push-ups and their variances
* Over and Unders
* Drunken Leprechauns