

The Weight of the World...



Is resting on your shoulders. Or at least that's what it often feels like, doesn't it? Who hasn't experienced tight, cramped, knotted muscles in the neck and shoulders after a long, stressful day. Muscle strain in this area of the body can contribute to rounded shoulders, poor posture and even tension headaches. Overly active shoulder muscles reflect the tension and anxiety we carry with us throughout the course of the day.

Unfortunately, relieving this strain is not as easy as simply telling yourself to relax your shoulders. Because more than likely, five minutes later, your shoulders are back in the same position they were before. If

you don't engage the appropriate muscles to properly stabilize the shoulder blades, keeping them in place, it won't matter how much you try to relax your muscles.

Most people don't realize that the shoulder blades, those flat triangular bones that sit on the back, are capable of quite a bit of movement. They can go up and down, towards and away from the spine, and even turn slightly. The ideal position of the shoulder blades is a slight, constant downwards (towards the hips) directional pull. Muscles in the back and trunk (lats, mid to lower trapezius, serratus anterior) are responsible for this depression of the shoulder blades, rather than the muscles in the neck or shoulders themselves. These muscles ultimately become strained and overworked as they were not designed to be used this way and are highly inefficient at this task.

One of the best ways to understand this concept is to think of stabilization of the shoulder blades like the workings of a pulley system. If you were to raise your arm straight up towards your head, the shoulder blades must draw downwards. Just like a pulley, the higher you lift your arm, the more depression you need in the shoulder blades. Additionally, after a certain degree of lift of the arm, the shoulder blades not only pull downwards but turn, like fans rotating in opposite directions. All of this occurs to create adequate space for the upper arm bone, enable the

back and trunk to get stronger and encourage the muscles in the neck and shoulders to relax.

Essentially, the harder you work--the more relaxed you'll be. The next time you're feeling tense and overwhelmed, focus on engaging the muscles in your back and trunk as well as softening your shoulders. So just because you carry the world on your back, doesn't mean that you have to look like you do.

Source: Gina Axelson Pilates Instructor and Studio Owner