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STRENGTHENING SHOULDERS

Why Do It:

If you've ever developed a shoulder injury from swimming, you know what a drag it is. It can take FOREVER to go away, and there's a limit to how much kicking and cross training you can do to make up for the loss of swimming. The best solution is to avoid shoulder injury in the first place.

Proper stroke mechanics are only one part of preventing shoulder injury. The other part involves strengthening certain muscles in your back -- especially the muscles that stabilize your shoulder joint. These exercises may not look like much, but if done with focus and on a regular basis they can help strengthen the right muscles and can help prevent a shoulder injury.

How to Do It:

Exercise #1

1. Start with feet shoulder-width apart and toes pointed straight ahead or slightly in. Bend the knees and bend over slightly. Let your hands and arms hang down.
2. In a slow, controlled movement, use the muscles in your upper back to raise your arms to shoulder level. Keep your torso stable as you do this. Think about forming a "T" with your arms, and try not to let the hands go above your shoulder level.
3. Hold the "T" for a second or two, then return the arms in a controlled movement to the starting position. Repeat 15 to 20 times.

Exercise #2

Same as Exercise #1 except that you are standing erect. Form a "T" and HOLD it, but try not to let the hands go above shoulder level. Also, try to keep your shoulders stable and steady -- don't hunch them up when you form a "T."

Exercise #3

1. Stand erect with feet shoulder-width apart and with arms extended directly in front of you. Separate the hands and roll them palms up as you move the arms as far apart as you can. Hold this position and squeeze/contract the muscles between your shoulder blades as you hold the position for a second or two.
2. Return the arms and hands to their starting point in a controlled movement. Repeat 15 to 20 times.



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Exercise #4

1. Start with feet shoulder-width apart. Hold your arms in front of your chest, with wrists, forearms, and elbows aligned and touching.
2. While keeping the elbows bent and your shoulders low and stable, open your arms as wide as possible and hold this open position for a second or two. Squeeze/contract the muscles between your shoulder blades as you hold this position.
3. In a slow, controlled movement, bring the hands and arms back to their original position. Repeat 10 to 15 times.

Exercise #5

1. Start with feet shoulder-width apart. Form a "goalpost" with your arms, with your elbows at about shoulder height.
2. While keeping the shoulders low and stable, rotate your hands down as far as possible and hold this position for a second or two.
3. Again, keeping the shoulders low and stable, return the hands to the "goalpost" position. Repeat 10 to 15 times.

Exercise #6

1. Start with feet shoulder-width apart. Clasp your hands behind your back, with fingers interlaced.
2. While keeping the shoulders low and stable, squeeze /contract the muscles between your shoulder blades and lift your clasped hands. Hold this position for a second or two, then return to the starting position. Repeat 10 to 15 times.

How to Do It Really Well (the Fine Points):

1. Try not to hunch your shoulders -- keep them stable and DOWN.
2. Make all your movements slowly and with control. Hold the finish position for a least one second to fully contract the muscles.