

Rhomboid Muscle Strain or Spasm

What is a rhomboid muscle strain or spasm?

Your rhomboid muscles are in your upper back, connecting the inner edges of your shoulder blades to your spine. A strain is an injury in which muscle fibers or tendons are stretched or torn. A muscle spasm is an involuntary contraction of the muscle.

How does it occur?

A rhomboid muscle strain or spasm is usually caused by overuse of your shoulder and arm, especially during overhead activities like serving a tennis ball or reaching to put objects on a high shelf.

It can also occur from activities such as:

- ▶ rowing
- ▶ carrying a heavy backpack, especially over one shoulder
- ▶ poor posture, especially from prolonged use of a computer.

What are the symptoms?

A rhomboid strain causes pain in your upper back between your shoulder blades and your spine. A spasm feels like a knot or tightness in the muscle. You may have pain when you move your shoulders or when you breathe.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will examine your back and shoulder and will find that these muscles are tender or tight.

How is it treated?

The injury should initially be treated with ice packs for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for 2 to 3 days or until the pain goes away. You can place crushed ice (in a plastic bag) or a frozen gel pack on the floor, put a towel over the bag or gel pack, and then lie down with your rhomboid muscles against the ice. Your health care provider may prescribe an anti-inflammatory medication.

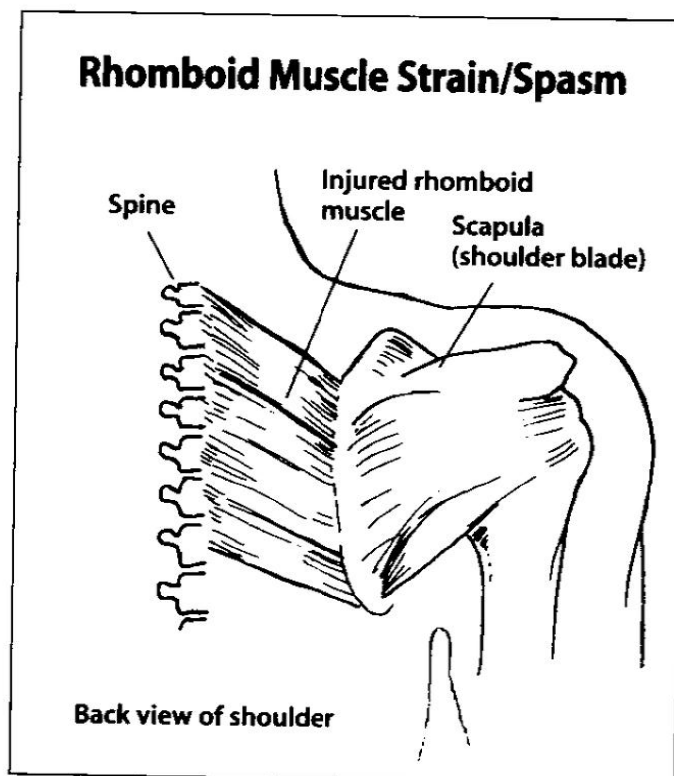
Massage is also very helpful. You can do a form of

self-massage by putting a tennis ball on the floor, lying down with your rhomboid muscles against the ball, and gently rolling the ball against your rhomboid muscles.

You will be given a set of rehabilitation exercises to help you return to your sport or activity. While you are recovering from your injury you will need to change your sport or activity to one that does not make your condition worse. For example, you may need to run or bicycle instead of playing tennis or rowing.

When can I return to my sport or activity?

The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your sport or activity as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury, which could lead to permanent damage. Everyone recovers from injury at a different rate. Return to your sport or activity will be determined by how soon your back



recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better.

You may safely return to your sport or activity when the muscles are no longer in spasm and you can move your shoulders and arms without pain.

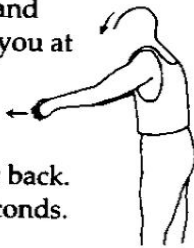
How can I prevent a rhomboid muscle strain or spasm?

Rhomboid strains and spasms are best prevented by warming up properly and doing stretching exercises before activities such as tennis, rowing, or overhead movements.

Rhomboid Muscle Strain or Spasm Rehabilitation Exercises

You may do all of these exercises right away.

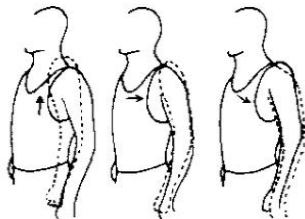
1. REACH AND PULL STRETCH: Stand and clasp your hands in front of you at chest height. Drop your head down, stretching the back of your neck. Reach forward with your arms, stretching your upper back. Hold this position for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.



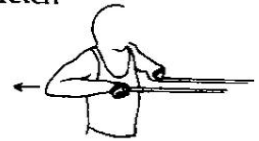
2. PECTORALIS STRETCH: Stand in a doorway or corner with both arms on the wall slightly above your head. Slowly lean forward until you feel a stretch in the front of your shoulders. Hold 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.



3. SCAPULAR RANGE OF MOTION: Stand and shrug your shoulders up and hold for 5 seconds. Then squeeze your shoulder blades back and together and hold 5 seconds. Next, pull your shoulder blades downward as if putting them in your back pocket. Relax. Repeat this sequence 10 times.



4. SCAPULAR RETRACTION USING ELASTIC TUBING: Take a 5-foot section of tubing and tie a knot in the center of it. Shut the knot in a door at about shoulder height. Standing about 3 feet away from the door, take one end of the tubing in each hand. Move your hands up to shoulder level, with your elbows, hands, and shoulders at the same height and parallel to the floor. Squeeze your shoulder blades back and together, and pull your elbows straight back, stretching the tubing for resistance. Hold 5 seconds. Return to the starting position and relax. Do 3 sets of 10.



5. DOOR FRAME STRETCH: Stand near a door frame. Lift the arm on your injured side straight out in front of you and grasp the door frame. Lean back, letting the pull of your body weight stretch the muscles near your shoulder blade. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

