

Sequential Scapular Stabilization: dead-hang to scapular pull-ups

Why:

- Neck and shoulder tension
- Strengthening without aggravating neck/shoulder/nerve injuries
- Building strength and mobility together for long-term shoulder health
- Building awareness of and strength in muscles that support the shoulders and arms from underneath so that they don't hang off the neck

How:

1. Begin by **checking in with your breathing**, noticing how it feels, what moves easily as you breathe and where there is more tension and effort. Commit to continuing maintaining fluid breathing for the whole time of this exercise. If you're holding your breath or grunting or wheezing, back off and return to relaxing your breath. Move your eyes and head around to **find comfortable neck movement**. Relax as much as possible while gazing towards the horizon. Clench and relax your jaw. Plan to repeatedly check in with your neck and jaw and relax any extraneous tension.
2. Before raising your arms, **point your palms toward the sky**. This is a shortcut for externally rotating your upper arms, which is a healthier way to reach above your head. (*Ask me how this motion can help prevent bursitis, tendonitis, and rotator cuff tears - I love nerding out about anatomy with clients!*)
3. Let your hands **softly grasp the bar**. (You can do this with door frames or tree branches, but it's WAY EASIER with a bar that's a comfortable size for your hand. The bar can be as low as chest height or as high above your head as you can comfortably reach.) Notice the sensations of touching the bar, check in with your breathing, and let go of any extra tension in your body. **Shake out your head and shoulders**, proving to your body that you can indeed use your hands without tensing your neck, shoulders, or jaw. *If you cannot relax your neck, shoulders and jaw, or if you have any pain or tingling/numbness, stop here. Ask for help and/or try again tomorrow.*
4. Keeping your hands on the bar, bend your knees and lower your body until your **arms are straight**. Recheck that your neck, jaw, and breathing are all relaxed. *If you cannot relax your neck and jaw, or if you have any pain or tingling/numbness, stop here. Ask for help and/or try again tomorrow.*

5. Slowly allow more of your weight to hang by your hands, perhaps by slowly picking up your feet behind you. **Hang and breathe**, keeping your neck and jaw relaxed.
6. Only when the previous steps are easy, begin to **move your shoulder blades without bending your elbows, tensing your neck, or holding your breath**. Draw the shoulder blades down your back and then slowly, smoothly allow them back up close to your ears. Repeat 3 or 4 times.
7. Return to standing. After you let go of the bar, **check in again with your breathing, your neck, your shoulders**. You might notice some empowering energy and/or some fatigue. There might be a lightness to your arms, a sense of support, or a decompressed feeling in your shoulders. You might find more space to breathe into your sides. If there's any discomfort, get curious about it. You might want to do less next time or perhaps ask for help figuring out how to get the benefits of this exercise with less discomfort.