

Avoid Working Just the Mirror Muscles

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When people lift they tend to focus on their anterior musculature, specifically the chest and arms. These muscles have been dubbed the 'mirror muscles' because you tend to look at yourself in the mirror while working them out, followed soon after by posing in front of a mirror at home. While this is great for trying to impress girls at the beach, you may be increasing the likelihood of sustaining a shoulder injury while decreasing your available power with overhead activities.

The often ignored back musculature helps to stabilize your shoulder blade. If these muscles are stretched out or weak, it can disrupt the natural rhythm between your shoulder blade and arm during overhead activities. Once this rhythm is off, your maximum power is available through a shorter arc of motion. This also increases the workload for the rotator cuff which can lead to shoulder impingement and rotator cuff injuries such as tendonitis or muscle tears. At risk athletes include those performing repetitive overhead activities such as pitching, serving in tennis or volleyball, and the freestyle and butterfly strokes in swimming.

How can you tell if your muscles are imbalanced? The easiest way is a quick postural assessment. Tight chest musculature will lead to your shoulders being in a forward, rounded position. This is usually accompanied by a forward head posture. If you have correct posture you should be able to draw a straight line from the back of your ear, through the middle of your shoulder, knee, to slightly in front of your ankle.

A few exercises for the back include seated rows, bent over rows, reverse flies, and lat pull-downs. If you need help incorporating back exercises into your workout, contact your athletic trainer or any of the Southeastern Physical Therapy offices.