

# OFF THE CUFF

Combat shoulder pain with these rotator cuff exercises from **Jeremy Granville-Chapman and Helen Walton**

**M**ost swimmers with shoulder pain have weakness, tightness and poor endurance of their rotator cuff muscles. Of course, many have technical flaws that promote shoulder pain too: poor rotation, bringing the arm out too far behind the shoulder blade and over-reaching are all common faults. While a swim coach should help you address your technique, this article shows you simple exercises that will strengthen your rotator cuff, stretch your capsule and hopefully reduce your pain.

## EXERCISES:

All exercises should be pain-free. For the first two exercises you should aim to complete two to three sets of each exercise, two to three times a day. Each set = 10 repetitions or to the onset of fatigue. To strengthen muscles takes 12 weeks of training so stick with it!

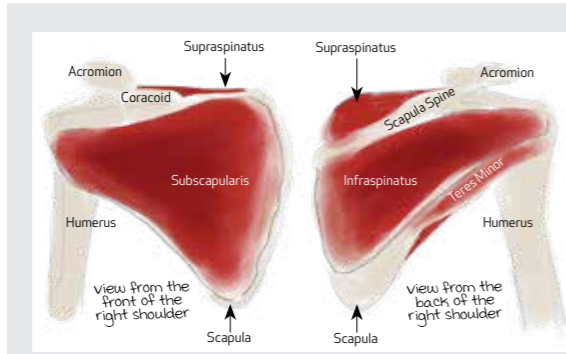
### Exercise 1:

Anterior rotator cuff, scapular stability and core strength

**GOAL:** Strengthen and improve endurance in Subscapularis, Serratus Anterior and core muscles

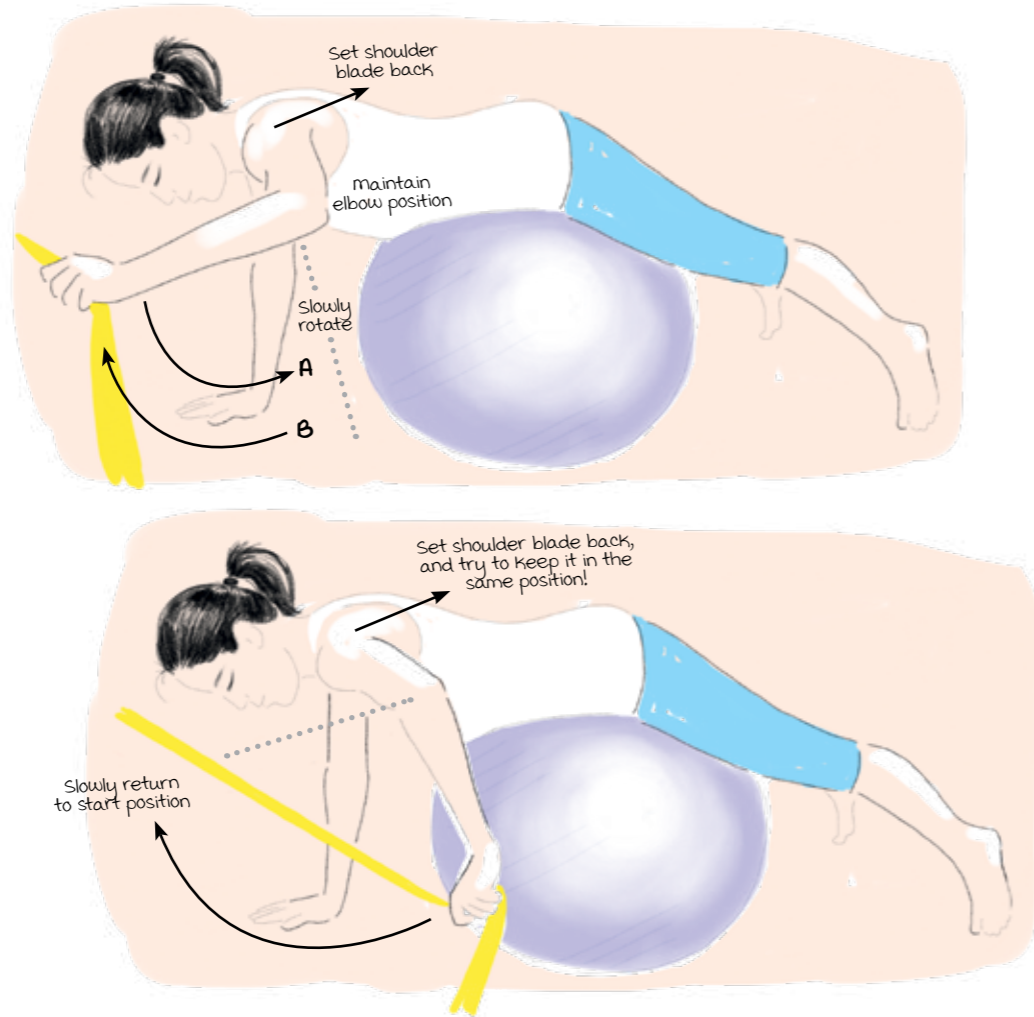
**EQUIPMENT:** Gym ball and yellow theraband

**METHOD:** Attach theraband to a low fixed point in front of you. Lying with your stomach on a gym ball, walk forwards with your hands, until your hips are over the ball and your toes still touching the ground. Grasp the band as shown in picture A, taking your weight through your other arm. Set your shoulder blade back and then rotate your hand down and back slowly through to position B. Try to keep your elbow in the same position throughout. Slowly return to starting position. Do three sets of 10 reps for each side, unless onset of fatigue precedes.



**WHAT IS THE ROTATOR CUFF?**  
Your rotator cuff describes four muscles that arise from your shoulder blade. They pull across your shoulder joint via tendons that attach onto the ball of your arm bone (Humerus). These muscles are important for controlling the movements of your shoulder and maintaining the ball in the socket as your arm is moved.

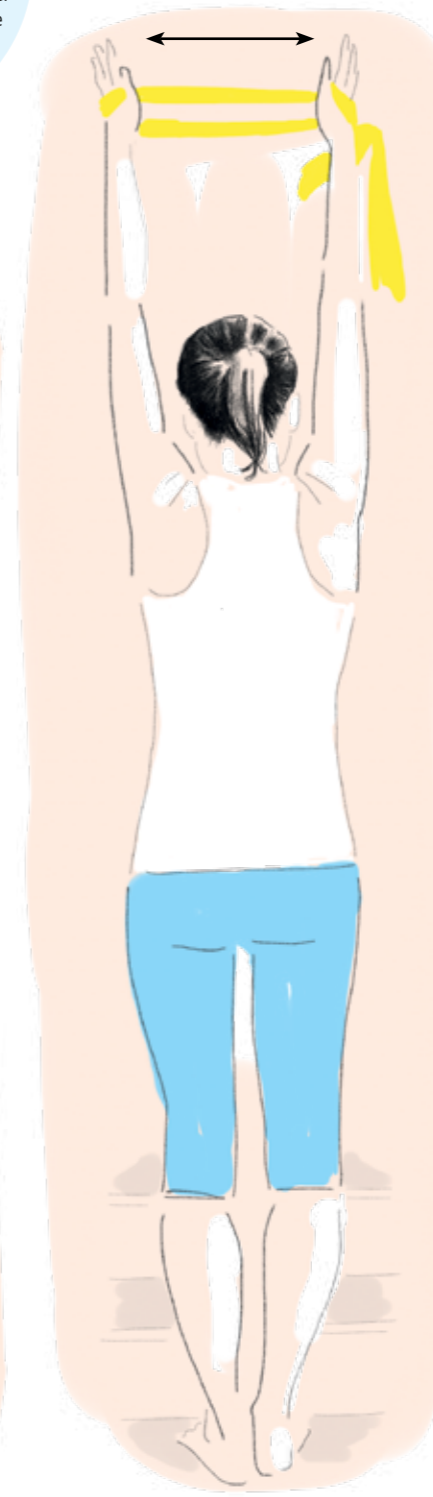
### Exercise 1



### DON'T FORGET

it takes persistence to make significant gains in strength, but if your pain worsens or persists, you should consult a physiotherapist or shoulder specialist. Do consider addressing your swim technique and training programme to optimise your chances of recovery.

### Exercise 2



### Exercise 2:

Posterior rotator cuff strengthening incorporating the kinetic chain.

**GOAL:** Strengthen posterior rotator cuff

**EQUIPMENT:** A step and yellow theraband

**METHOD:** Loop the band and place it around the backs of both hands at shoulders' width. Gently push outwards with your hands to take up the tension in the band. Step up and reach up above your head whilst pushing out with the backs of hands. Step down and return hands back to side, maintaining the pressure through the band at all times.

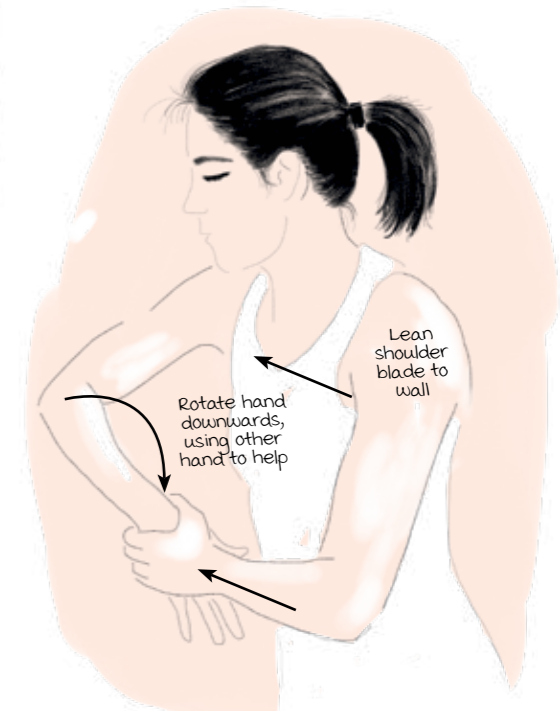
### Exercise 3:

Stretch posterior rotator cuff

**GOAL:** Reduce posterior tightness to improve ball-in-socket alignment through stroke

**METHOD:** (This exercise is a stretch, so you may feel some stretching discomfort but should not feel intense pain.) Fix your shoulder blade by leaning into a wall. Place your arm away from your side. Using your opposite arm, push your forearm down (keep the shoulder blade and elbow in the same position) until a stretch is felt. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds and repeat three times, four to five times a day.

### Exercise 3



Exercise illustrations: Juliet Boucher Illustration

### Expert advice

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