



## Shoulder Saver Tips – Part I, Shoulder “Don’t’s”

*Travis Manners, PT, SCS, CSCS*

### 1. Never go behind the head with a bar

This "don't" applies mostly to lat pull downs and military shoulder press. Going behind the head places the shoulders in a fully externally rotated position and puts the ligaments in the front of the shoulder on a significant, potentially damaging stretch. In addition, in this position the rotator cuff is not designed to produce force and asking it to do so could cause damage to the cuff.

### 2. Avoid dips

Dips are a staple in all gyms and they are a great exercise to develop the chest and the triceps. However, these gains are at the expense of the labrum in the shoulders. The labrum is a cartilaginous ring that deepens our shoulder sockets and provides a stability bumper in our shoulders. As the shoulder moves into extreme degrees of extension during the dip, the upper arm bone is shoved upward and then rotates from a backward to forward position in the rim of the socket. This shearing and rotational force can create a tear and detachment of the labrum from the socket. This is an injury otherwise known as a SLAP tear. Does this always happen? No, but this exercise has to be high on your high risk, low benefit filter when selecting it as an exercise.

### 3. Don't Bench Press or Push-up Incorrectly

A lot of people do not realize that there is an incorrect way to do a bench press or a push-up. The key point is not to flare your elbows away from your side. The right position as you lower the bar or your body is to keep the upper arms at a 45-degree angle to the torso. Flared elbows (closer to 90 degrees) has been shown to increase stress through the shoulder joint, the ligaments on the front part of the shoulder, and the subscapularis muscle.

### 4. Don't do "shoulder day" at the gym

This "don't" embarks on another topic which I can talk for days on - training a single joint in the gym. Unless you are a bodybuilder who is competing ditch single joint training. The shoulder gets all the work it needs with bench press, rows, chin-ups, and external rotation to be healthy. If you must do some direct work, overhead presses or lateral raises are good. Just do not do them on the same day.

### 5. Ditch upright rows

I am completely perplexed that this exercise still exists and is still being taught by personal trainers, physical therapists, and strength coaches. If I said to you, "I want you to maximally internally rotate your arms, lift your arms up, and jam the most prominent aspect of your arm bone up against the top of your shoulder blade", would you do it or at least scratch your head? I just described the exact motion of an upright row. A great receipt for shoulder impingement and tendonitis and an even better way to keep me employed!

I could go on and on with more "don'ts" but I think those above hit the major errors I see and answers a majority of the questions I get in the clinic. I hope this was helpful and look forward to Part 2 - Shoulder Do's very soon.

