

***ARM CARE PLAN***

Over the course of a baseball season, a player's throwing arm is placed under a tremendous amount of stress. Approximately 70 percent of high school baseball players experience some form of upper-arm pain that limits their participation.[2] The source of pain may be attributed to a number of factors, including eccentric stress when decelerating the arm, valgus stress with increased "lay back," shoulder girdle impingements, and/or any form of shoulder blade dysfunction. (Learn more [shoulder injury prevention tips](http://www.stack.com/video/632058857001/Dr-Tim-Kremchek-on-Injury-Prevention-for-Pitchers/).) This may sound complex, but it's important to understand that the shoulder can be hurt in multiple ways.

With such a fragile part of the body under constant stress, it is imperative to have a plan for taking care of your throwing arm to stay healthy throughout a season. The acronym "RAMS"—for Recovery, Activation, Mobility, Strengthening—provides an easy way to implement consistent and effective methods to keep your arm feeling strong and without pain.

**R for Recovery**

It's critical to have a post-game or post-bullpen session to reduce inflammation of any damaged tissue. Three quick and easy strategies to take care of your throwing arm are simply to:

* Ice (20 minutes initially).
* Foam roll areas prone to tightening up, including the lats, rear shoulder, groin, low back and glutes. (Try this[foam rolling routine](http://www.stack.com/2012/05/01/soft-tissue-care-for-athletes-part-3-upper-back-and-shoulders/)).
* Perform a light soft tissue massage with either a tennis ball or a lacrosse ball to directly target smaller areas, including the forearms, triceps, rear delts and hip flexors.

**A for Activation**

You must activate your shoulder muscles 24 hours after a game or throwing session to increase blood flow to damaged tissue and expedite the rebuilding process. Achieve this by performing rotator cuff and scapular stabilizing exercises. Try these three movements.

**Standing "W"**

* Stand in an athletic position holding a band at shoulder-width with your thumbs up and palms facing each other.
* Keeping your elbows bent at 90 degrees and tucked to your sides, simultaneously pull your shoulder blades back and externally rotate your shoulders.
* Continue pulling your hands back to form a "W" with your arms.

**Sets/Reps:** 2-3x8-12

**Coaching Points**: Focus on retracting your scaps and keeping your elbows tight to your body // Keep your palms in a neutral position (*not* facing up).



**Plank Circles**

* Assume a push-up position on a non-stick surface, placing your hands on two separate towels (or use Cal slides, furniture movers, slide board, etc.).
* Keeping your back straight and your body in a straight line, make small circles clockwise with one arm for specified reps.
* Perform the specified reps in the opposite direction.
* Switch hands and repeat.

**Sets/Reps:** 2-3x5-10 each arm

**Coaching Points**: Maintain a neutral spine with yours hands centered directly underneath yours shoulders // Keep your weight balanced on both arms // Keep your hips squared to the floor



**Scap Push-Up**

* Assume a push-up position with your hands directly under your shoulders.
* Pull your shoulder blades back fully without bending your elbows or letting your hips sag.
* Push your shoulders forward as far as possible.
* Repeat for specified reps.

**Sets/Reps:** 1-2x8-12

**Coaching Points**: Keep your body in a straight line // Plant your palms firmly on the ground and drive your weight through the balls of your feet.



**M for Mobility**

It's extremely important to address areas of the body that are prone to losing flexibility, such as shoulder internal rotation and thoracic spine mobility.[1] Here are two movements to help you maintain optimal mobility after a throwing session.

**Thoracic Spine Crunches on T-Spine Ball**

* Place a T-spine ball (two tennis balls taped together) in the middle of your back at the same level as your sternum. Keep your low back flat and hips on the ground.
* Extend your arms straight up over your chest and elevate your shoulders off the ground slightly to apply more pressure to the T-spine ball.
* Lower to the ground and repeat for specified reps.

**Sets/Reps:** 1-2x10-15

**Coaching Points:** Try to touch your chin to the ceiling as your shoulders elevate and your hands reach up // Your back may feel tender initially



**Kneeling Groin Stretch**

* Kneel on one knee and place your opposite leg directly to the side with your toes pointed straight ahead.
* Place your hands on the ground in front and keep your back flat to form a "table-top" position.
* Shift your weight to the heel of your kneeling leg. Stop when you are unable to maintain a flat back.
* Hold for 10-20 seconds, then shift your weight forward to your hands.

**Sets/Reps:** 1-2x8-10 each side

**Coaching Points:** Arch your low back as you shift back toward your heel to enable a deeper stretch through the groin and to identify the end range of motion



**S for Strengthening**

This is without a doubt the most essential aspect of maintaining a healthy arm. Without an adequate level of strength, your arm doesn't have a chance of combating extreme stress over the course of a season. Here are two horizontal rowing variations you can add to your strength program to help increase lower trap activation and scapular strength, which will help stabilize your shoulder..

**Side Plank Retraction Row**

* Assume a side plank position facing a cable machine with your bottom elbow directly under your shoulder.
* Grasp the cable handle with your top hand with your arm fully extended in front of your chest.
* Pull your shoulder blade back and row the cable handle to your armpit. Hold for specified duration.

**Sets/Duration:** 2-3x20-40 seconds (or do this for 10-12 reps instead of time)

**Coaching Points:** Maintain a straight line from your head to your toes // Keep your shoulder blade retracted without letting it drift up towards your ear



**Kneeling Iso-Rear Delt**

* Secure two bands to a railing or fence, or use an independent cable system.
* Kneel down facing the attachment point and hold the bands with an underhand grip.
* Pull one arm back so your elbow is at 90 degrees, and keep it pinched to your side.
* Perform rows with your opposite arm for specified reps.
* Repeat on the opposite side.

**Sets/Reps:** 2-3x8-12 each arm

**Coaching Points:** Keep your core and glutes engaged // Finish the row with your palms up // Do not let your elbows go past your torso



**References**

[1] Laudner, K. G., Lynall, R., & Meister, K. (2012). "Shoulder adaptations among pitchers and position players over the course of a competitive baseball season." *Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine*, Retrieved from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.p.atsu.edu/pubmed/?term=Shoulder Adaptations Among Pitchers and Position Players Over the Course of a Competitive Baseball Season.

[2] Meyers , J. B., Oyama, S., & Hibberd, E. E. (2013). "Scapular dysfunction in high school baseball players sustaining throwing-related upper extremity injury: a prospective study." *Journal of Shoulder and Elbow Surgery*, Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jse.2012.12.029