

A Back to Front Approach for Front to Back Muscle Pain

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How many of you take your sport and exercise very seriously and have a regular fitness training regime?

If so, do you also spend adequate time stretching the muscles you specifically exercise? The answer should be a definite "yes."

But whether you're a fitness fanatic, an armchair sportsman, or if normal day to day activity is your only exercise, there are some muscles you work hard regularly but rarely or never stretch.

Can you name two of the most heavily exercised but most taken for granted and under-stretched muscles in the body?

Pecs and Hip Flexors.

Ten points if you said Pecs (Pectoralis Major and Minor - in the chest) which draw the arms around to the front, and Hip Flexors (mainly Iliopsoas group - across the front of the hips) which lift the legs.

What singles out these muscles for special mention is that for long periods of each normal day they are being used (contracted) and **exercised**.

But most people are unaware this is happening. Whenever you sit down - for example, at your work desk for most of the day, watching TV or driving a vehicle - the hip flexor muscles stay contracted.

Similarly, every time you work with your arms to your front - like at a desk or computer, peeling spuds over the sink, laying paving blocks, hammering nails, serving at a counter, etc - your Pec muscles (also known as shoulder medial rotators) are contracted and being exercised.

But even most serious fitness enthusiasts, who would never dream of exercising a muscle group without also stretching it, ever think about stretching these particular muscles for their routine daily activities.

Now, with all the above in mind, how many of you ever get sore or tight in the lower back, or in the back of the neck and shoulders? (If you answer "no," you're definitely in the minority).



Back Pain from Front.

It may surprise you to know that apart from cases of specific injury or slipped disc, etc., lower BACK pain or tightness can usually be attributed to tight hip flexor muscles in the **front**.

Similarly, tight **front** Pec and other shoulder medial rotators are generally responsible for muscular aches and pains in the **back** of the neck, shoulders and between the shoulder blades.

One joint hip flexor (Iliopsoas group) muscles go from the side of the spine from mid to lower back and down across the front of the hips to the top of the legs. When they are tight, they tilt the hips forward, which causes the smaller muscles in the lower back (from the top of the hips to the spine) to also tighten by default. This is where you feel sore.

Think about the sore lower back you get after driving or sitting at a desk for several hours without a break.

When you get up to stretch, you generally lean backwards, not forwards. In other words, you stretch your hip flexor muscles - across the **front** of your hips - to make your BACK feel better.

When Pec muscles are tight, they make the shoulders rounded and pull the cervical spine and head forward.

For the eyes to focus ahead rather than down, muscles in the BACK of the neck and shoulder area are forced to tighten to pivot the head back and upward on top of the neck.

What this all means is pain in the lower BACK and shoulder areas is often just a SYMPTOM - not the main cause of the pain, which is often in the **front** of the body.

As unlikely as it sounds, it may be that releasing tight hip flexors in the front is also needed to help alleviate pain between the shoulder blades.

It could be that a tight hip flexor on one side raises one hip higher than the other.

This in turn tightens muscles on one side of the spine in the lower back, which in turn pull on other spinal muscles up between the shoulder blades on that side.

Unfortunately, for time, cost and other reasons, many health professionals focus on only treating the **symptom**, not the cause, in the case of muscular aches and pains.

Take the Time.

However, most qualified and experienced remedial massage therapists are prepared to take the time to not only relieve the symptom, but also try to determine and remove the main cause or contributing factors.

Remedial massage and stretching can alleviate or heal most muscular aches and pains, as well as have many other benefits.

If you'd like to know more about remedial massage, call one of our qualified therapists today.

