Thoracic Spine Exercises

Strengthen and stretch the thoracic spine to rehabilitate and prevent injuries. Thick muscles, tendons and ligaments attach the twelve vertebra of the midback, also known as the thoracic spine, to each other, the ribs, the shoulder blades and the vertebra of the neck and lower back. Perform exercises tailored to eliminate the source of specific injuries and pain by strengthening weaker areas and elongating tight muscles.

Cat Back Stretch

Assume a kneeling position on both hands and both knees. Exhale and vacuum your waist. Raise your midback as high as possible, as if imitating a cat stretching its back. Hold for six seconds, inhale and slowly lower your midback as far as possible. Hold for six seconds. Repeat for six to fifteen repetitions to stretch the muscles of your midback and ribcage.

Midback Stretch

Stand with your feet close to a vertical bar and grab the bar with both hands. Exhale, straighten your arms, bend your knees and stretch backward until you feel a comfortable pull between your shoulder blades. Hold this position for forty to sixty seconds. Perform three sets at multiple side-to-side and up-and-down angles to stretch the muscles between the shoulder blades at various angles.

Bird Dog Exercise

Assume a kneeling position on both hands and both knees. Hold your neck in line with your spine. Raise your left arm directly in front of you and hold for two seconds. Lower and repeat with the right arm. Alternate arms for twelve to fifteen repetitions.

Inhale and flex your right hip and knee toward your chest. Exhale, extend your hip and knee directly behind you in a straight position and hold for two seconds. Return to the starting position and repeat with the left leg. Alternate legs for twelve to fifteen repetitions.

Simultaneously raise your left arm and right leg. Hold for two seconds then lower them. Raise the right arm and leg left and hold for two seconds. Perform twelve to
fifteen repetitions to simultaneously re-establish correct movement patterns and strengthen the thoracic spine.

**Midback Pulls**

Wrap a strong rope or exercise band around a secure vertical pole. Wrap the rope or band around both hands and grip it firmly. Stand with your toes close to the pole and straighten your arms with your palms facing each other. Lean backwards slightly until you feel resistance in the rope. Exhale and pinch your shoulder blades together without shrugging your shoulders. Hold for two seconds, then inhale and relax. Perform twelve to fifteen repetitions to develop strength, stability and endurance in the scapula retractor muscles.

**Precautions**

Never self-diagnose and always consult your treating physician before beginning an exercise program. Always work within your capabilities. Never perform an exercise that elicits or increases pain or symptoms.

**References**

- Spine Doctor: Exercise Therapy [http://www.spine-dr.com/site/exercise/fitness_article3.html]

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