

Prehab: Steps to Avoid Injury

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PHOTOS BY JARED MCMILLEN

WHEN CLIMBING WAS NEW TO MY LIFE, it was my entire focus...an infatuation. After 10 years, climbing is a part of me...I wear it every day. And with such intimacy comes hurt and injury. Each instance brings the clarity of hindsight—what I could have done to prevent it: more thorough warm-ups and strengthening exercises for key areas.

For many friends (and me) the inaugural climbing injury was a tear or strain of the rotator cuff. Time and bigger numbers brought on tweaked fingers. Finally reaching the upper V grades and 5.13, elbow tendonitis of epidemic proportions was combated by swallowing handfuls of glucosamine and MSM. “That seems to be the natural progression of climbing injuries,” says Dave Steinberger, Las Vegas based physical therapist and climber of 7 years. Although the above injuries, and those to the knee, lower back and ankle can appear at any time, you can safeguard against them and their long-term effects by starting a maintenance program.

Steinberger repeatedly emphasized the importance of warming up slowly. Skipping the warm-up increases the risk of injury, as tight muscles are strained. By warming up and raising your body temperature, you’re loosening muscles before testing them at maximum capacity. As your heart rate rises, blood flow increases and

oxygen makes its way faster to the muscles being used. (No more whining about long approaches, they are useful). So, when you start pulling on your project, your muscles will be ready...further protected from tearing.

If your skin can’t cope with a few hours of easy climbing before cranking, it becomes more vital to incorporate simple stretching exercises into your day. It may be the 20 minutes you trade to avoid months of rehabilitation.

Liza Wenacur-Bakken, an Aspen, CO. based physical therapist and climber of 10 years suggests the following stretches to avoid injury:

- Begin by opening and closing your hand, then rolling the wrists clockwise and counter clockwise.
- To warm up your fingers, extend your arm and flex your hand so your palm faces forward (as though telling someone to stop) gently pull each finger back, holding the stretch for 10 seconds.

“There are postural things that start to happen with climbers,” says Wenacur-Bakken, “the shoulders become rounded, the chest muscles are tight and the back becomes overdeveloped. This can feed the increasing chance of shoulder injuries.” She explains that if the alignment in your shoulders is off, reaching for holds while climbing can cause an impingement.

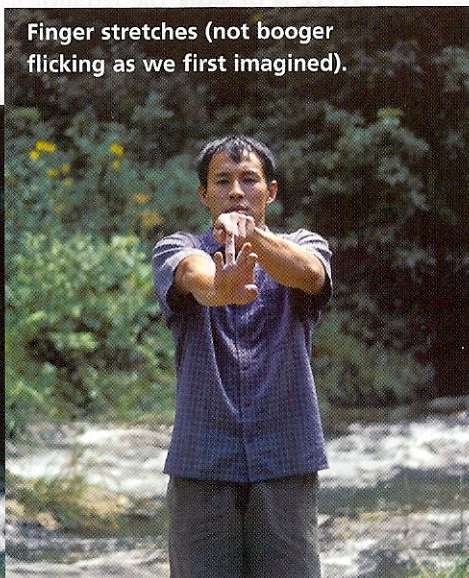
Open hand stretch



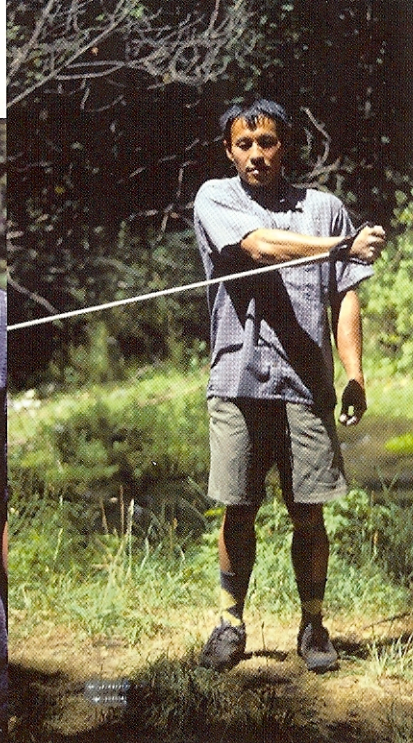
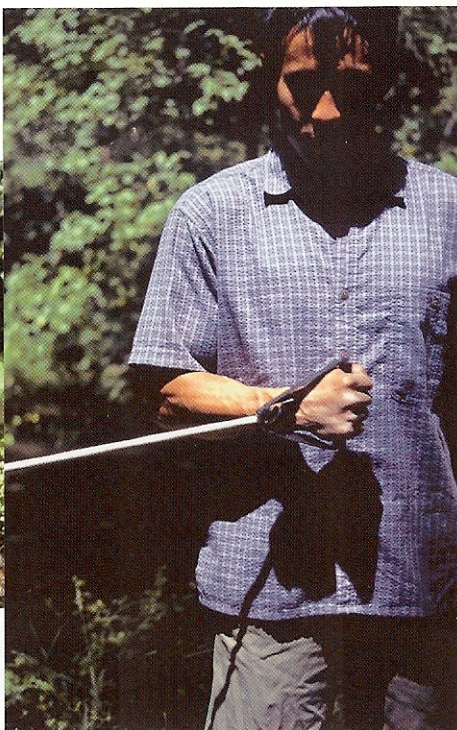
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Finger stretches (not booger flicking as we first imagined).



Using a band to help with internal rotation of the shoulder.



Recommended shoulder stretches:

- Shoulder rolls—roll your shoulders forward then backwards, each for sets of 10.
- Standing up, clasp your hands behind your back. With your arms straight, begin to lift your hands up and hold. Hold for 10 seconds, do 3 sets.
- Posterior capsule stretch—Take your arm and pull it across the front of your body with the opposite hand. This will stretch the back of the capsule, which is fibrous tissue enveloping the joint, that often becomes tight. Hold for 10 seconds, do 3 sets.


Wenacur-Bakken stresses the importance of holding each stretch without bouncing. “Bouncing causes the muscles to shorten,” she explains, causing a reflex effect, the opposite of what your stretching intended. She also notes the importance of stretching out your chest muscles, because they attach onto the shoulder from the front and their tightness helps to perpetuate the shoulder’s roundedness.

- Chest Stretch—With your arm extended, place your palm on the rock (or wall). Turning your body away from the rock, draw your shoulder blades down and hold.

After dropping some cash on a crashpad, your next investment should be exercise bands or tubing. The exercises described are great for prevention as well as shoulder rehabilitation.

For the exercises below, use tubing secured on one end to a stable fixture. Perform each one standing up straight, with good posture, keeping the shoulder blades pulled down. Avoid letting your shoulders creep up toward your ear. There should be no pain associated with these exercises, only a feeling of fatigue after 2-3 sets of 10-15 repetitions.

- External Rotation—When recovering from an injury, begin by holding your elbow at your side and rotate your arm outward, away from the body, keeping your forearm parallel to the floor.
- Internal Rotation—Begin as described above, but this time rotate your arm inward, across the body, with the forearm parallel to the floor.
- Shoulder Adduction—Begin with your arm out to the side, then pull toward the body, against the resistance of the band.
- Shoulder Abduction—Begin with your arms at your side and thumb pointed out. Pull your arm out to the side (away from your body), against the resistance of the band.

Stay tuned for more information on elbows, fingers, wrists and knees in upcoming issues of *Vbouldering*. 

Shoulder rolls

