

MUSCLE STRAIN — SPINE & CORE

Trapezius Strain

Understanding your injury and getting back to full speed

WHAT IS IT?

The trapezius spans from the base of the skull across the shoulders to mid-back, shrugging and stabilizing the shoulder blade. The upper portion is the usual strain site.

A **strain** means muscle fibers were overstretched. We grade strains I–III: **Grade I** — mild, microscopic fiber injury; **Grade II** — moderate, a partial tear with strength loss; **Grade III** — severe, complete disruption.

HOW IT HAPPENS

Carrying heavy loads (bags, packs), a sudden pull, prolonged stressful posture, or a lifting injury.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Aching and knotting between the neck and shoulder tip, pain with shrugging or carrying, tension-type discomfort at the end of the day.

HOW LONG RECOVERY TAKES

- **Grade I:** a few days–2 weeks
- **Grade II:** 2–4 weeks
- **Grade III:** 4–8 weeks

TREATMENT

Almost all muscle strains heal without surgery. For the first 72 hours: relative rest, ice 15–20 minutes several times daily, compression, and *gentle* motion — complete rest slows healing. Then a progressive program: pain-free motion → isometrics → strengthening → **eccentric loading** (strengthening the muscle while it lengthens — the phase that prevents re-injury) → sport-specific work.

Scapular strengthening (rows, shrug progressions), postural endurance work, and stress/ergonomic management.

RETURNING TO SPORT

Return when strength is at least **90% of the other side**, motion is full and pain-free, and you can perform your sport's movements at full speed without hesitation. Returning before the muscle is re-strengthened is the main cause of re-injury.

PREVENTING THE NEXT ONE

Load-splitting when carrying, workstation setup, regular movement breaks.

WHEN TO CALL US

Weakness raising the arm or a shoulder blade that 'wings' suggests a nerve problem rather than a simple strain — mention it at follow-up.

CALL THE OFFICE RIGHT AWAY

Pain not controlled by medication, fever over 101.5°F, spreading redness or warmth, or new numbness or weakness. Direct office line (513) 441-5639; after hours (513) 354-3700.



SCAN FOR THE LATEST VERSION ONLINE

robertpettitmd.com/handouts/trapezius-strain.pdf

This handout is for general patient education and does not replace personalized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given by Dr. Pettit and your care team.