Shrugs

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My first coach, Szatyj (last name), always told me, “There are only two kinds of shrugs: a good one and a bad one.” The thing to remember is that a good one has many variations with different effects. The determining factor for deciding which variation is used, when it is used, and how it is to be performed will depend upon the particular sport you are training for, and what age group or preparation level you are working with. Generally, the main reason for using this exercise is for development of the trapezius muscles, vertical explosiveness, and to increase the flexibility of the centuro-scapularis musculature to minimize the chance of shoulder dislocation and other serious shoulder injuries.

The rules for effectively executing a shrug are as follows:
1. Head position: chin is always fixed between the shoulders, the eyes looking straight ahead two to three yards in front on the floor. The head must not move forward or backward during the exercise. I consider the position of an athlete's head very important in any exercise or event, reflecting strength or weakness. A strong, confident athlete has his chin fixed between his shoulders. The head leaning forward or backward is a sure sign of weakness and desperation. If you were to follow a final event in track and field or other sporting events, you would notice that the winner's head is straight.
2. Shoulder position: turned in.
3. Elbow position: turned out and locked straight.

Exercise 1, Photo 1. Shoulders are turned in, chin fixed between shoulders.

5. Number of repetitions: depends upon athlete’s age, preparation level, preparation period, and intensity.
6. Sport specificity: different variations for sprinters, throwers, ball sports, weight lifters, etc.
Some additional advice:
With children it is best to start with very light weight, to first develop a perfect kinesthetic position. For them, the order of the exercises should be: up and down shrug, special good morning, then step-by-step, introduce the others. Exercise techniques follow.

Number of reps: 8-12/set
Number of sets: 5-6/day
Number of days: 3-4/week

Percentage: 9-11 year olds — 30-40 percent of the athlete's body weight
12-14 year olds — 50-70 percent of the athlete's body weight
15-16 year olds — 60-100 percent of the athlete's body weight

Exercise 1: UP & DOWN - “I DON'T KNOW” SHRUG WITH BARBELL
Photo 1. Starting position: flat-footed, flexed knees, elbows turned out and straight, shoulders turned in, the chin fixed between the shoulders.
Photo 2. Keeping the knees, elbows, head and shoulders in place, do the very simple up and down “I don’t know” motion, feeling the barbell’s weight on a flat foot (between the balls of the feet and heels, but lightly toward the heels, not on the toes).

Exercise 2: SHOULDER ROTATION SHRUG WITH BARBELL
Photo 1. Start the same as with the up and down shrug.
Photo 2. Rotate the shoulder backward and forward. The feet, knees, elbows, and head position should remain the same as in exercise #1.
Exercise 3. UP & DOWN SHRUG WITH DUMBBELLS
Photo 1. Starting position: stand with dumbbells in hands, as in the previously mentioned description.
Photo 2. “I don’t know” up and down shrug movement.

Exercise 4: SHOULDER ROTATION SHRUG WITH DUMBBELL
Photos 1 and 2: Starting position same as exercise #3, but rotate the shoulder forward or backward without changing the feet, knees, elbows, and head position.

Exercise 5: DUMBBELL SHRUG WITH ARMS BENT, DUMBBELL TO THE ARMPIT
Photo 1. Begin the same as the other dumbbell shrug exercises. After a very energetic start, bend both elbows, raising the dumbbells up to the armpits. I emphasize again, do not change the flat-footed, flexed knee position, or firmly fixed chin position.
Photo 2. For several sports there are variations of this shrug: raising up onto the toes, but still keeping the correct position of the head and elbows, and extending only the knees.

Exercise 3, Photo 1. Use same starting position, except dumbbells are used.
Exercise 3, Photo 2. Do the “I don’t know” movement.
Exercise 4, Photo 1. Same as Exercise 3.
Exercise 4, Photo 2. Rotate shoulder forward or backward.
Exercise 5, Photo 1. Keeping feet flat on the floor, raise dumbbells energetically to armpits.
Exercise 5, Photo 2. A variation is to raise up on the toes while lifting dumbbells.
Exercise 6: SPECIAL GOOD MORNING AND SHRUG

Photo 1. Starting position: Stand on a box or block not more than one foot high with the barbell in hand, the feet are placed at hip width apart with slightly flexed knees.

Photo 2. Bend over with curved back, the head following the line of the neck, looking at the heels.

Photo 3. Begin with a hyperextension of the neck.

Photo 4. Continue with the hyperextension of the shoulders and then the back muscles.

Photo 5. In the final phase of the back extension, simultaneously slightly bend the knees a little more (like a double knee bend motion) and start to straighten the trunk in a vertical plane.

Photo 6. Keep your balance on flat feet with elbows turned out, shoulders turned in, and chin fixed between the shoulders. Avoid pushing the hips forward.
Photo 7. Raise up onto the toes and shrug.

**Exercise 7: SNATCH PULL AND SHRUG**

Photo 1. Starting position: The bar is close to the shins, elbows turned out, shoulders over the bar and turned in; straight back, the head in a neutral position (in a line with the neck and back).

Photo 2. Start slowly! Raising the bar from the platform (do not jerk the bar), open the knee angles, but still hold the shoulders over the bar. Elbows should be turned out, shoulders turned in, keeping the head, neck and back in a perfectly straight line. Using flat feet, hold this position until the knees are relatively straight (but not completely extended). There will be a sensation of falling backwards, but you won’t because the barbell’s weight will hold the body perfectly balanced.

Photo 3. Start the double knee motion and at the same time tighten the back musculature. Raise the shoulders without changing the head, shoulders, elbows, and feet positions.

Photo 4. The “hitting position.” Still flat-footed (not onto the toes), the weight is divided between the balls of the feet and the heels. Elbows are turned out, shoulders turned in, keeping the bar as close to the body as possible. Hit the bar with the help of the inertia due to extension of the knees and trapezius, without bending the elbows. Because the main goal of this exercise is to develop a very flexible and strong trapezius, I must emphasize not coming up onto the toes.

There is a variation of this exercise for discus throwers where the toes are used. However, I do not recommend this to any athlete until they have learned to do the exercise on flat feet.

Exercise 7, Photo 1. Bend knees while grasping the bar, elbows turned out.

Exercise 7, Photo 2. Raise the bar slowly while straightening knees. Keep head, neck and back straight.

Exercise 7, Photo 3. Tighten back muscles and raise shoulders.

Exercise 7, Photo 4. Keep feet flat on the floor, the bar as close to the body as possible. Turn shoulders in sharply.
Photo 5. A variation of snatch pull: bending the elbows, but holding the correct body position.
Photo 6. The same motion as shown in Photo 5, raising slightly onto the toes.

Exercise 8: COMBINATION SHRUG
Starting position: stand with barbell in hand, respecting the aforementioned rules of correct position.
Photo 1. With the straight back, bend over with barbell below the knees as close as possible to the shins. Stand in this position for three to five seconds. This isometric position helps the athlete to find the perfect body balance and develop the musculature in an ideal position, which is crucial for an athlete.

Without changing the body position, start the slow motion of a shrug, accelerating continuously, finishing with a powerful shrug.

Exercise 9: BEHIND THE TRUNK SHRUG
Photo 1. Starting position: the bar is resting in a squat rack or on boxes or blocks about two to three feet high. Standing with back to the bar, grip the bar in hands. The bar should be resting against the back of the legs. Remember to maintain the correct position.
There are two variations of this shrug:
Photo 2. Using light weight do an up and down shrug without changing the body segments position, or
Photo 3. Using heavier weight, start bending the knees and using the legs to help do a perfect shrug.

Exercise 7, Photo 5. A variation showing elbows bent.
Exercise 7, Photo 6. As Photo 5, only raise slightly onto toes.
Exercise 8, Photo 1. Hold starting position 3-5 seconds, then slowly move to shrug position finishing with powerful shrug.
Exercise 9, Photo 1. Grab bar behind you, with bar resting against back of leg.
Exercise 9, Photo 2. Do an up and down shrug with light weights.
Exercise 9, Photo 3. Using heavier weights, let the legs help you lift the weight.