

Death of the Upright Row

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Among avid gym-goers, one of the most common exercises I see performed for shoulder development is the upright row. I, myself, used to be a huge fan of upright rows, often performing them on a weekly basis. What I failed to realize, and what these novice lifters fail to understand, however, is that the upright row is an exercise that will inevitably do more harm than good to your shoulders.

First, I'll discuss a bit of shoulder anatomy. The shoulder consists of four joints: the sternoclavicular (SC) joint, which is located at the junction between the superior end of your sternum and the medial end of your clavicle; the acromioclavicular (AC) joint, which is located at the junction between the distal end of your clavicle and your acromion; the glenohumeral (GH) joint, which encases the humeral head and is the "ball and socket" joint we normally think of when we think of the shoulder; and the scapulothoracic (ST) joint, which allows movement of the shoulder blade as well as greater movement of the GH. Also, the humeral head is the proximal end of the humerus and is often thought of as the ball in the GH "ball and socket" joint.

Okay, so why are upright rows so bad? I mean, *Muscle and Fitness* preaches their benefits religiously in every issue. The downfall of upright rows is not that they are being printed in *M&F*, but rather the internal rotation of the humerus *in addition* to the abduction of the ST. If there was only abduction of the ST you would be performing a lateral raise, and if there was only internal rotation of the humerus you would be turning your knuckles in towards your legs and pointing your pinkies towards the ceiling. However, because there are both of these components to the movement, what ends up happening is, as the weight is being lifted, the humeral head internally rotates in the GH as the ST abducts, which causes the humeral head to smash into the top of the GH, causing injury to the AC sitting on top of it. Tough.

This collision between the GH and humeral head does not happen normally during ST abduction, nor does it happen if there is only internal rotation of the humerus. It is the combination of the two movements that causes shoulder pain to develop after this exercise has been performed. Presses, dips, and isometrics are all exercises that develop the shoulders in a much more structurally sound manner. So please, if you are performing upright rows, stop, or you can rest assured that you will be paying for it in the future.

Get big or die tryin'.

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