

Dumbbell Shrug

Technique guide | Upper back

Equipment: Two matching dumbbells



01 Start

Arms naturally long; weights beside the thighs.

02 Shrug

Weights rise only as the shoulders elevate.

| Muscle focus

Primary

Upper trapezius

Assisting

Levator scapulae and middle trapezius

Posture and grip

Forearm and hand muscles; spinal erectors and trunk

Postural and grip roles do not imply the same training stimulus as the prime mover.

| What this exercise does

Elevating the shoulder blades trains the upper traps around the neck-to-shoulder area. Keep the dumbbells beside the body and move the shoulders smoothly up and down. The elbows do not curl the weights upward.

Illustrations

Dumbbell Shrug

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How to perform

- 1

Set up

Stand tall with feet about hip-width apart. Hold one dumbbell beside each thigh, palms facing inward. Keep your head stacked over your torso, arms naturally long, and wrists aligned.
- 2

Shrug

Breathe out and raise both shoulders toward your ears. Keep the elbow angle nearly unchanged; the dumbbells rise a short distance with the shoulders. Do not push your head forward.
- 3

Pause and lower

Pause briefly at a comfortable height, then breathe in and lower slowly to the starting position. Avoid shoulder circles, bouncing, or leg drive.

Keep arms long. Lift shoulders. Lower with control.

Common mistakes and corrections

Mistake	Correction
Rolling the shoulders	Use smooth elevation and lowering.
Curling with the elbows	Keep the elbow angle nearly unchanged.
Bouncing with legs or hips	Use a lighter load; keep the body still.
Jutting the chin or arching the neck	Keep the head naturally over the torso.

Getting started

Start light and practise a smooth shrug through a pain-free range. Stop for neck or shoulder pain or tingling. Return the weights to a stable surface when finished.

Sources and demonstration

- 1. Bodybuilding.com - Dumbbell Shrug demonstration
- 2. ExRx - Barbell Shrug (muscle roles for the shrug pattern)
- 3. Pizzari et al. - Traditional and modified shrug research
- 4. ScottHermanFitness - How To: Dumbbell Shrugs

References accessed: 2026-10-17