



# Safety Muscles

By Allison Ishman, LMT, Certified Personal Trainer

Over 50% of women beginning a new exercise program stop because they get hurt in the first 6 months. (Fitness Magazine, Jul/Aug 96) I am always emphasizing the benefits of a safe strength training program. **Due to common postural imbalances and because of the high risk of injury** involved in beginning any new, rigorous, or repeated activity, I strongly advocate that everyone strengthen 6 core **Safety Muscles**. Strength in these muscles especially benefits people who are over-active, under-active, under high-stress, or doing a repetitive-motion activities.

**Building Safety Muscles BEFORE strengthening major muscles** used for weight loss, power, or just to look good is an outstanding approach to staying injury-free and feeling better, stronger, and having a smooth strength training progression. Safety Muscle strength is an absolute must in preventing injury, recovering from injury, increasing performance, improving a person's ability to be more athletically aggressive, and reducing stress. Strength training without building small core muscles first is similar to playing Russian Roulette; you never know what muscle you may pull or which joint may suffer from imbalanced muscle strength.

Before you go out there and hit the leg presses, chest flies, bench presses, and calf machines, **try 1-3 weeks of strengthening your Safety Muscles**. Then watch your performance improve progressively as you stay injury free and happy!

**The following are the 7 Safety Muscles.**

## 1. Abdominals

*Why Strengthen This Muscle?* Strengthen abdominals to prevent back pain and reduce back tension, as well as to reduce the load put on your groin muscles. (Nearly all adults that do not strengthen quadriceps, hamstrings, and inner thighs regularly, as well as stretch their groin muscles several times per week, carry a great deal of their upper body weight and the weight of bags, books, and other items they carry – with their groin muscles. For more information about this, read my article titled My Hips are Doing What? at [www.ibodycare.com.HipsDoingWhat.htm](http://www.ibodycare.com.HipsDoingWhat.htm). Strong abdominals look great as well – an added bonus for your self-esteem.

*What Strengthening This Muscle Balances:* This new strength takes pressure off of the Psoas (groin) muscles, balances the tension in your back, and reduces the load of daily activities on your hips, chest,. Through a series of structural and fascial lines in the body, abdominal strength reduces strain in your neck and all the way down to your feet. No kidding. For further explanation, read my article titled My Hips Are Doing What?

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## **2. Butt**

*Why Strengthen This Muscle?* Strengthen butt to reduce the load on your hips and low back, as well as to reduce the load put on your groin muscles. Activities that strengthen gluts tend to take pressure off of the sacroiliac joint at the base of the low back, and takes pressure off of the Psoas and other hip flexors. A butt that doesn't sag also looks and feels more attractive, which is another added bonus for your self-esteem!

*What Strengthening This Muscle Balances:* Balances out tension in hip flexors and groin, low back, and quadriceps.

## **3. Teres**

*Why Strengthen This Muscle?* Actually two muscles, the Teres Major and Teres Minor do at the should essentially what the Lattissimus Dorsi or "Lat muscle" do for the back. These muscles help you pull back and down. Since we so rarely do this action, these muscles tend to get weak and most people find this exercise challenging at first. Strength and tone in teres muscles help balance tight necks and mid-backs. For some people, strengthening this muscle directly gets rid of a headache. So you can strengthen these outer shoulder muscles to reduce headaches and neck pain, forearm strain and carpal tunnel like conditions.

*What Strengthening This Muscle Balances:* This evens out the stress in muscles of the neck, back, and chest.

## **4. Rotator Cuff**

*Why Strengthen This Muscle?* Rotator cuff muscles typically get weak because we don't use them, like the teres muscles. Often people tear them because the tendons get so tight and the muscle belly is so weak and flabby that they just pull right apart. In this case, a little strengthening can go a long way to take pressure off of the neck and upper back. Again, we are strengthening the lower shoulder to reduce headaches and neck pain, forearm strain and carpal tunnel like conditions.

*What Strengthening This Muscle Balances:* This evens out the stress in muscles of the neck, back, and chest.

## **5. Posterior Deltoid**

*Why Strengthen This Muscle?* Posterior deltoid is actually on the upper back of the arm, and tends to get weak...that's right...because we don't use it. Rarely are people pulling things in a way that uses Posterior Deltoid. As with the prior two muscles, strengthen this lower shoulder muscle to reduce headaches and neck pain, forearm strain and carpal tunnel like conditions, and even out build from front and middle deltoid, chest, and bicep strengthening.

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*What Strengthening This Muscle Balances:* This evens out tension in neck, back, and chest muscles. Perhaps even more importantly, it takes pressure off of the Deltoids and Biceps muscles that most people strength train to look good. So, Posterior Deltoid is very much a safety muscle.

## 6. Inner Thigh

*Why Strengthen This Muscle?* Strengthen the inner thigh to reduce the load on your Iliotibial Band (strong outer thigh tendon) and Psoas (groin). The additional compensating muscles you can expect relief in are calves and shins, low back, and quadriceps. The ITB is a major weight-bearing and high activity area – it carries a lot of the load.

*What Strengthening This Muscle Balances:* This directly balances out the Iliotibial Band and Psoas.

## 7. Lower Quadriceps

*Why Strengthen This Muscle?* The lower section of the quadriceps is the front of the thigh. Building strength here gives greater support to the knee, but most importantly takes pressure off of the hip flexors that become chronically tight. Also, strength in lower quads gives you more power for stairs and hills, allowing you to have better control. Focus on the last 45 degrees of a leg extension to strengthen here.

*What Strengthening This Muscle Balances:* This balances and takes pressure off of the hip flexors and hamstrings. These strong leg muscles need balance to keep your hips from tilting out of a normal position.

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Have questions? Want to suggest a self-care technique not already listed here?

Want to share an experience? I'd love to hear it. Email me at [ishman1@ibodycare.com](mailto:ishman1@ibodycare.com).

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