



Rhomboid Major and Minor Explained

The quadrilateral shaped rhomboids lie deep to trapezius on the upper back. Although considered as two separate muscles, major and minor act together with common actions.

The attachments and actions

Rhomboid minor, the superior of the two, runs obliquely and downwards from the spinous process of the 7th cervical and the 1st thoracic vertebrae to the medial border of the scapula at the base of the spine. The fibres of the larger rhomboid, major, run parallel with those of the smaller muscle. Its attachments simply follow on, inferiorly, from rhomboid minor; running from the spinous processes of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th thoracic vertebrae to the medial border of the scapula from the spine to the inferior angle.

Together the rhomboids retract the shoulder girdle, during which they produce slight elevation. Their line of pull allows them to return the scapula to neutral from an upwardly rotated position and they can also be thought of as scapula stabilisers – they fix the scapula in adduction when the shoulder is flexed or extended.

What the experts say

Although the rhomboids retract the shoulder girdle and play a minor role in scapula stabilisation, renowned authorities such as Kendall, do not recommend targeting the rhomboids with exercise.

Points to consider

As rounded shoulders are present to some degree in most individuals, it is to be expected that the rhomboids, as a shoulder girdle retractor, would commonly be found to be lengthened and weak. It is however, far more common for them to be strong, tight and dominant over middle trapezius during retraction – even when appearing to be held in a lengthened position.

Tightness and over activity in the rhomboids can cause discomfort, even pain under the medial border of the scapula. This hypertonicity can also lead to the inhibition of serratus anterior - a muscle vital to scapular stabilisation.

Whilst working the rhomboids cannot and should not be avoided in the long term, it is crucial to ensure that trapezius, particularly the middle and lower, portions, are functioning well before any retraction of the shoulder girdle is attempted.

Do you know?

Although the rhomboids are often quite capable of retracting the shoulder girdle, even against a resistance, their dominance is not desirable for either ideal resting alignment or dynamic stabilisation of the shoulder girdle.

Once adequate function has been ascertained or developed in trapezius, retraction can be completed in the knowledge that rhomboids have 'accepted' their synergistic role.