

Woman's World

The Woman's Weekly

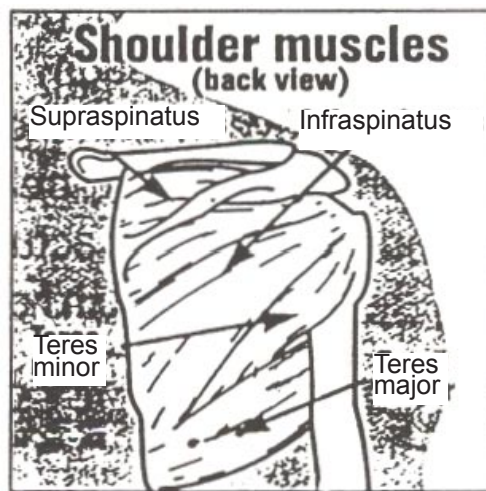
YOUR GOOD HEALTH

Is your handbag hurting your health?

Are your back and neck sore and stiff-but you don't remember straining them? Do you get frequent headaches for no particular reason? The culprit could be your shoulder bag! The more we're on the go, the more goes into our bags--cosmetic cases, books, gym clothes, lunch, cell phones and even laptop computers! The problem: trying to balance all that weight on one shoulder throws your posture out of whack, putting your neck, shoulders and spine at risk.

'You either draw up your shoulder, drop it or lean forward or back to try to adjust to the weight,' explains Helen Schilling, M.D., of the HealthSouth-Houston Rehabilitation Institute in Texas. 'The muscles contract, and that sets you up for pain, stiffness, tenderness, even injury.'

If the strap digs into the muscle, it can even compress nerves and blood vessels, causing tingling down the arm. In fact, carrying just 6 percent of your body weight--less than eight pounds for a 130-pound woman--is enough to cause problems. Your best



These four muscles work with other, larger muscles to lift and lower your arms. But when you carry too heavy a handbag they become squeezed, causing tendonitis, which weakens the muscles and may even cause tearing.

defense? It's not carrying a handbag instead. Research shows toting 10 pounds by hand can cause more pain in the arm, elbow, wrist, hand and back than toting it on the shoulder, says researcher J. Steven Moore, M.D., of Texas A&M University. It also makes the heart work harder. Instead, experts advise:

- **Choosing a bag made of lightweight material** like nylon or cloth. Some leather bags weigh two pounds empty!

- **Being strap happy.** Ideally, your bag's strap should be at least two inches wide and adjustable so you can vary the way you carry it, including across your torso. Or opt for a backpack, which distributes the weight evenly on the back and shoulders if you use both straps.

- **Cleaning out your bag regularly** and filling it only with what you really need.

- **Hoisting better.** Lift a heavy bag onto your right shoulder with your left hand or vice versa to prevent overtaxing the muscles that raise up the wrist, advises **Jacob Rozbruch, M.D.** of Beth Israel Medical Center North in New York City. Frequently alternating shoulders will also go a long way toward lessening aches.

- **Doing yoga** or other stretching and strengthening exercises to get the body strong, flexible and back in balance.

-Melissa Klein

For more information on Dr. Jacob Rozbruch, visit: www.jacobrozbruchmd.com