

## The Importance of Thoracic (Upper Back) Mobility.

### **The Benefits of good thoracic ROM<sup>1</sup>.**

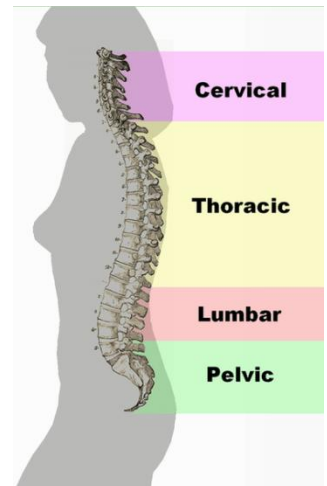
**Better posture** – Many people have an exaggerated kyphosis (forward curve of the upper back). Improving thoracic mobility is the first step to dealing with this.

**A more stable lower back** – Your lumbar spine will be free to provide stability, rather than make up for your lack of mobility.

**Healthier shoulders** – A rounded upper back brings the shoulders forward and restricts scapular movement especially during overhead movements. Thus increases the likelihood of a shoulder injury such as rotator cuff impingement.

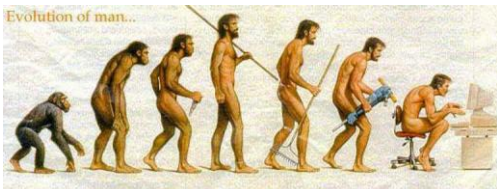
**More lung volume** – Improving thoracic mobility improves the rib mechanics which improves lung function.

**Better functional fitness** – By engaging your thoracic spine in times of spinal rotation, flexion, and extension (like throwing a ball or a punch), instead of your lumbar spine, you will get stronger, faster, and more explosive in those movements.



### **Why does the thoracic spine get stiff?**

The thoracic spine (T-spine) is crisscrossed by lots of muscles and connective tissues as well as being where the rib cage attaches. Movement is therefore naturally restricted when compared to the cervical or lumbar spine. This means that when the area becomes dysfunctional it can get VERY tight. As well as having direct consequences on local muscles (such as causing them to ache) it can create problems in other areas of the spine such as the neck and lower back as the whole thing is one functional unit.



I often see patients who have poor core stability AND restricted T-spine ROM. In this circumstance the two dysfunctional states are quite likely to be maintaining each other. I.E. If the thoracic spine is not moving as it should the low back might be forced to function in a way it's not designed to. Thus, upper back restriction = extra demand on muscles supporting the low back = extra load on lumbar spine = ouch!! Similar is

often also true for neck pain which might also be predisposed by poor thoracic mobility.

It is important to remember that improving thoracic mobility may be an essential element in resolving lumbar or cervical issues.

### **Exercises to improve thoracic mobility**

I have produced a video of my favourite thoracic mobility exercises. To view it visit [www.lacemarketclinic.co.uk](http://www.lacemarketclinic.co.uk), click the link to the 'Video Library' and scan down until you find it.

NB This video contains some powerful exercises. It has been produced specifically as an aid to treatment not as a replacement for it. If you have poor thoracic mobility, or an undiagnosed condition, doing all of these exercises without advice might make things worse.

My next article on core stability will discuss more clearly how low back and core stability problems may be related with poor thoracic mobility.

<sup>1</sup> ROM = Range of Motion