

## The Therapeutic Benefits of Indian Club Swinging

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Right about now is when most people ask, "What in the world is an Indian club?" Another question usually follows quickly: "Why should I (or my patients) swing them?" Well, you are about to learn the answers to these questions and why club swinging is the best therapeutic exercise you are not using with your patients. These amazing tools are lightweight, inexpensive, portable and effective. They are challenging to master, yet deliver substantial therapeutic benefits in a short period of time. If you are searching for a "go-to" exercise for increasing postural control, neurogenic programming, coordination and rhythm, and shoulder stability/mobility, while reversing the effects of the Janda [upper-crossed syndrome](#), then this is the tool for you.

I became exposed to the benefits of Indian club training from mentors Gray Cook, PT, and Brett Jones, RKC, several years ago and began implementing the protocols into patient rehab programs. Based on positive patient feedback and results-driven outcomes, it has become a foundation of my exercise rehabilitation protocols.

### History / Background

Club swinging is believed to have originated in India by soldiers as a method of improving strength, agility, balance and physical ability. During the seizure of India, British officers witnessed the graceful motions and essential properties of exercising every muscle of the body. The British brought the Indian clubs to Europe, where the Germans and Czechs adopted club swinging into their physical training systems. German immigrants brought the clubs to the United States in the mid-1800s, where they were soon introduced into both American school physical-education programs and military physical-readiness training. Indian club exercises lost popularity in the 1920s as organized sports and games took precedence.

Today, Indian clubs are made of wood or plastic, varying in weight from 1 to 2 pounds depending on the strength and capability of the person using them. Swinging heavy weight is *not* the objective with this exercise. A precise intent and control of movement through patterning is the goal for driving a high neural demand to muscular primary movers and stabilizers.

### Primary Benefits

Indian club swinging can be described as circular weight training that exercises the shoulder, wrist and elbow in ways not possible with traditional linear resistance training. Club swinging will not only strengthen muscles and ligaments, maintain joint flexibility and improve [range of motion](#), but also will greatly reduce risk of future injury. The swinging motion requires one to engage the core muscles and maintain trunk stability and proper hip extension patterning for hip stabilization. Patients who engage in a protocol of monitored club swinging can return to baseline strength and flexibility faster. They also help promote functional movement and good biomechanics of the shoulder. The forward head carriage, thoracic hyperkyphosis, and anterior shoulder rotation associated with the upper-crossed postural distortion syndrome may be reversed with the proper biomechanics associated with club motion.

Due to sedentary lifestyles prevalent in society, people tend to hold a lot of tension in the shoulders, scapula, and upper posterior chain muscles. Swinging clubs promotes dynamic and fluid movement patterns in the posterior chain, leading to increased strength and durability. There may also be dramatic improvement in tension headaches and chronic upper-extremity issues such as elbow tendinitis due improved fascial elasticity in the functional fascial arm lines. This strength translates to improved performance in activities of daily living from the hips and **shoulders** working as a coordinated unit for functional movement.

Primary benefits include:

- Increases joint mobility
- Develops shoulder girdle efficiency and stability
- Develops coordination
- Strengthens the posterior chain
- Improves elbow and wrist flexibility
- Enhances range of motion
- Efficient movement patterning
- Enhances neural coordination

Postural movement patterns are learned early in life by the central nervous system (CNS). However, structural or functional body stressors (tension, trauma, genetics, etc.) may prevent achievement of optimum posture. Faulty posture from physical compensations alter joint mechanical behavior, flexibility and range of motion. The increase in mechanoreceptor stimulation from chronically locked joints results in neuroreflexive muscular changes (i.e., protective muscle guarding).

Long-standing overactivation of abnormal joint reflexes causes changes in spinal cord memory that eventually "burns a neural groove" in the CNS as the brain and cord are unknowingly saturated with a constant stream of inappropriate proprioceptive information. Inherently, the brain comes to rely on this faulty information about where it is in space to determine how to establish perfect posture. The brain simply forgets what its alignment should be. In other words, the body now makes the abnormal its new normal.

Neurology wins every time. The silent progression of faulty postures and dysfunctional movement patterns are part of the reflexogenic relationship between muscles and joints. Neurogenic muscle activation patterning by club swinging is an effective way to "reprogram" the CNS for optimal function and reverse abnormal patterning.

Old-time strongman Eugene Sandow said, "*The mind and conscious control of the body are pre-eminent in the quest for developing a beautiful physique.*" Powerful words that resonate in modern times. The human body is an amazing machine capable of wondrous compensations and adaptations to its environment. Homeostasis at its best! Integrating the ancient art of Indian club swinging into rehabilitation and corrective exercise can strengthen the foundation of human durability. Get out there and start swinging those clubs and you will feel the difference. Oh, and your patients will get better, too! We call that a win-win!

OCTOBER 2011