



## Washcloth

The Washcloth is a full body, integrative movement that works with the muscles of the core, shoulder girdle and hips. The exercise involves lying on the back with the knees bent and arms out to the sides, rolling the arms in opposite directions while lowering the knees down alternately to each side, and twisting the core of the body from side to side.

### EXERCISE DESCRIPTION

**Starting Position:** Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet on the floor, and arms stretched out to the sides like the letter T. Bring your knees and feet together so they are touching.

**Washcloth:** All at the same time, roll your right arm down toward your feet and your left arm up toward your head; let your head roll to the left; and lower your knees down to the right side. Feel the twist through your shoulder girdle and throughout your entire spine from top to bottom. Then, slowly and gently roll everything back to center. Then do the movement to the other side: roll your left arm down toward your feet and your right arm up toward your head; let your head roll to the right; and lower your knees down to the left side. Move slowly and lazily. Repeat as many times as you want.

### ANATOMY OF THE WASHCLOTH

The Washcloth engages many muscles because it is a full body movement that consists of rotating the spine from top to bottom, rotating the hips to both sides, and rotating the shoulders.

**Core:** The *internal and external obliques* and the *rectus abdominis* do most of the work in the core of the body in this movement. The *multifidi* and *rotatores*, small muscles in between each vertebrae, also help to rotate the spine to either side.

**Hips:** See “Anatomy of the Internal & External Hip Rotator Releases” for the list of muscles that rotate the hips.

**Shoulders:** The movement of the shoulders in this exercise is complex, as it involves medially rotating the glenohumeral joint and elevating the scapula on one side, while

laterally rotating the glenohumeral joint and depressing the scapula on the other side. The muscles involved in these actions are:

**Medial rotation of glenohumeral joint:** Deltoid, Latissimus dorsi, Teres major, Subscapularis, Pectoralis major

**Elevation of scapula:** Upper trapezius, Rhomboid major and minor, Levator scapula

**Lateral rotation of glenohumeral joint:** Deltoid, Infraspinatus, Teres minor

**Depression of scapula:** Lower trapezius, Serratus anterior, Pectoralis minor

## CONDITIONS HELPED BY THE WASHCLOTH

The Washcloth addresses the following conditions by releasing and improving control of the muscles in the core, shoulder girdle and hips:

- Back pain
- Disc problems
- Scoliosis
- Neck tightness and pain
- Shoulder tightness and pain
- Frozen shoulder
- Tightness in the abdominals
- Hip tightness and pain

## HOW TO TEACH THE WASHCLOTH

**Get the student in their starting position.** The student should lie down on their back with their knees bent and feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart (they will bring their feet and knees together after learning the shoulder movement). They should bring their arms out to the sides like the letter T.

**Invite the student to close their eyes.** Closing their eyes removes all the visual information that their brain would otherwise have to process. Keeping the eyes closed allows the student to focus completely on their internal sensations.

**Teach the shoulder movement first.** Suggest to the student that they imagine their arms to be forming one long rolling pin. Before having them roll their arms in opposite directions, get them comfortable with how to roll them in the same direction. Instruct your student to roll their rolling pin on the floor down toward their feet. Their shoulders will press forward off the floor, and their hands will roll forward so that the

backs of their hands almost touch the floor. Then they can slowly release and gently let their shoulders and arms roll back to their neutral starting position. Then instruct your student to roll their rolling pin on the floor up toward their head. Their shoulders will press down into the floor, their back will arch and their chest will stick out. They can practice this basic movement several times if needed. Then instruct your student to roll their arms in opposite directions at the same time. When doing so, one shoulder will press forward off the floor while the other presses down into the floor. The student should feel a twist through their shoulder girdle. Have your student roll their arms back and forth several times to get the hang of this movement.

**Then incorporate the head.** When your student is ready, they can incorporate the movement of their head. They should roll their head back and forth as they roll their arms back and forth. Their head will always turn toward the side of the arm that is rolling up toward their head.

**Then incorporate the legs.** When your student is ready, they can incorporate the movement of their legs. They should bring their knees and feet together so they are touching side by side. As they roll their right arm down and their left arm up, they should lower their knees down to the right side; always to the side of the arm that is rolling down. So, they are always rolling their head so that they are looking away from their knees. They should then come back up to neutral gently, slowly untwisting everything. Then they can go to the other side, rolling their left arm down, right arm up, and lowering their knees down to the left side. They can repeat the full Washcloth as many times as they wish.

### **Consideration:**

The shoulder movement alone, without the legs, is a wonderful release for the muscles of the shoulder girdle. Encourage your student to practice the shoulder movement several times before incorporating their legs.

### **Common mistakes:**

The most common mistake in practicing the Washcloth is forgetting to really twist through the shoulder girdle after the leg movement is incorporated. Students tend to focus on the twisting of the core and forget about the full movement of the shoulders. Remind your student to keep doing the shoulder movement fully, allowing one shoulder to press forward off the floor while the other shoulder presses down into the floor. The movement is about the shoulders, and the arms are just extensions of what is happening in the shoulders.

If someone has a tight lower back and is prone to arching, they will probably tend to be arched in the full Washcloth exercise. They may overuse their back muscles to do the twisting of the core of their body. They should be sure to practice the Arch & Flatten and Back Lift before doing the Washcloth so that their back is released. They should

practice the Washcloth very slowly so that they can consciously engage their obliques and rectus abdominus as they twist from side to side.

**The following is an example of how I teach the Washcloth:**

Gently come down to the floor, and lie down on your back. Bend your knees up and put your feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart. Stretch your arms straight out to the sides like a letter T. We'll do this movement in parts, and then we'll put it together.

Imagine that your arms are forming one long rolling pin. Start to slowly roll that rolling pin forward, so that your shoulders roll forward and press off the floor toward your knees. Roll your arms as far forward as you can comfortably. Then, slowly and gently roll back to where you started.

Now, roll that rolling pin backward, up toward your head, so that your shoulders press down into the floor. Your chest may stick out and your back may arch a bit. Roll as far as you can comfortably, then slowly and gently roll back to where you started.

This movement is about your shoulders, and your arms are just along for the ride. Repeat this sequence one more time, first slowly rolling your arms forward, letting your shoulders roll forward and press off the floor toward your knees. Then slowly roll back to where you started. Then roll your arms up toward your head, letting your shoulders press down into the floor. Then slowly roll back to where you started.

Now we'll make this a little more complicated. You'll be rolling one arm down toward your feet while you roll the other arm up toward your head. You'll feel a twist through your shoulder girdle as you roll your arms in opposite directions. Remember, this is about the movement of your shoulders, and your arms are just along for the ride.

Start by rolling your right arm down toward your feet, letting your right shoulder press off the floor. At the same time, roll your left arm up toward your head, letting your left shoulder press down into the floor. Feel the twist through your shoulder girdle, like you're wringing out a washcloth. Then, slowly and gently release and let your arms and shoulders roll back to where you started.

Now, roll your arms the other way. Roll your left arm down toward your feet, letting your left shoulder press off the floor. At the same time, roll your right arm up toward your head, letting your right shoulder press down into the floor. Feel that nice twist through your shoulder girdle, like you're wringing out a washcloth. Then, slowly and gently release and let your arms and shoulders roll back to where you started.

Let's repeat this again, and now I want you to let your head be a part of the movement. Your head will always roll toward the arm that is rolling up toward your head. So, as your right arm rolls down toward your feet, and your left arm rolls up toward your head, your head

will gently roll to the left. Then, let yourself slowly and gently come back to where you started.

Now, as your left arm rolls down toward your feet, and your right arm rolls up toward your head, your head will gently roll to the right. Then, let yourself slowly and gently come back to where you started.

Go back and forth one more time, letting your head roll along with the movement, and feeling that nice twist through your shoulder girdle.

When you're done, slowly bring your arms and head back to your center starting position and rest for a moment.

Now you're going to bring your legs into this movement, and do the full washcloth exercise, which is a full-body twist.

You already have your knees bent and your feet on the floor. Now, bring your knees and feet together so they're touching, with your feet still on the floor. Have your arms stretched out straight to the sides.

Roll your right arm down toward your feet and your left arm up toward your head, and at the same time, lower your knees down to the right side. Let your head roll to the left, so that you're looking away from your knees. Feel the twist through your shoulder girdle and throughout your whole spine from top to bottom. When you're ready, slowly untwist, bringing everything back to where you started.

Now, do this to the other side. Roll your left arm down toward your feet and your right arm up toward your head, and at the same time, lower your knees down to the left side. Let your head roll to the right, so that you're looking away from your knees. Feel the twist through your shoulder girdle and throughout your whole spine from top to bottom. When you're ready, slowly untwist, bringing everything back to where you started.

You can keep doing this several more times, slowly going from side to side. Make sure to keep twisting through your shoulder girdle, letting one shoulder press off the floor as the other presses down into the floor.

When you've done this as many times as you want to, you can come back to center, stretch out your legs, and relax.