

If you've spent any time touring—whether as a musician, roadie, or crew—you know the tour grind isn't some glamorous party. It's manual labor combined with travel, weird sleep schedules, and endless load-ins. One of the most persistent annoyances? Shoulder pain and stiffness.

After 9 years running venues and helping touring acts with load-ins, watching crews work, and talking to musicians about what breaks first on the road, I've learned a few things about shoulder health on tour. Today, I'm breaking down why shoulders lock up, the usual suspects, and practical fixes you can use with no fancy gym access.

Why Do Shoulders Lock Up on Tour?

Touring is a perfect storm of risk factors for shoulder pain and stiffness:

- **Load-in injuries:** Lifting heavy gear awkwardly, often in cramped spaces or on stairs, leads to sudden or cumulative strain.
- **Repetitive strain specific to instruments:** Guitarists holding uncomfortable postures, drummers doing the same motions nonstop, brass players holding heavy instruments—shoulders take a beating.
- **Van travel stiffness:** Hours cramped in a van cause muscles to tense and circulation to slow, resulting in knots and stiffness.
- **Sleep debt and adrenaline timing:** Late nights, early mornings, and adrenaline highs followed by crash lows affect muscle recovery and increase tension.

Let's unpack these, then get into solutions.

Load-in Injuries and Safe Lifting

One thing no one tells you: most touring injuries start with the load-in. Those times when you're rushing to get gear inside, sometimes down broken stairs or dodging venue quirks like broken elevators (yes, I keep a mental list).

Here's the truth: shoulders lock up because they get overloaded, usually from bad lifting mechanics or sudden jerks. You're not a superhero—there's no point in macho advice telling you to "push through it." That sets you up for injury.

Safe Lifting Tips on Tour

1. **Use your legs and core:** Bend at the knees, not the waist. Engage your abs to support your spine.
2. **Keep gear close to your body:** The further something is from your centerline, the more strain on your shoulders and back.
3. **Don't twist while carrying:** Turn with your feet instead of your torso to prevent shoulder torque.
4. **Communicate with your crew:** Make sure load-in partners coordinate lifting and lowering, distributing weight evenly.

Sometimes even with proper technique, your shoulders will get sore. That's where tools like kinesiology tape can help support the joint and reduce swelling. I've seen touring pros use it to keep going without aggravating injuries prematurely.



Instrument-Specific Repetitive Strain

Different instruments demand different shoulder postures and repetitive motions:

- **Guitarists:** Holding the neck in one arm, often with poor posture causes tension and “knots” in the rotator cuff.
- **Drummers:** Repetitive arm motions overhead and out in front can lead to inflammation in the shoulder joint.
- **Brass and woodwind players:** Supporting heavy horns or instruments on one side for hours stresses the muscles.

Over time, this leads to tightness and sometimes “locking” where the shoulder gets stiff and painful.

One trick I recommend is using a lacrosse ball for targeted self-myofascial release. The “lacrosse ball shoulder knot” massage can be a game-changer:

How to Use a Lacrosse Ball on Your Shoulder Knot

1. Place the lacrosse ball between your shoulder blade and the wall.
2. Lean into it and roll slowly around tender spots, stopping on “knots” for 20-30 seconds.
3. Breathe deeply and relax as the muscle releases.

This is especially easy to do backstage or in your van—no fancy gear required.

Van Travel Stiffness and Circulation

Sitting in cramped vans for hours on end isn’t just boring, it causes real physical issues. Poor circulation and restricted movement make [green room warm up](#) your shoulders stiff and can even cause numbness or tingling.

To combat this, get into the habit of daily **shoulder rolls** and gentle stretches when you stop driving or ride shotgun. I always recommend the **band pull aparts** exercise to musicians and crew—it’s simple, requires just a resistance band, and opens up those tight shoulder muscles.



Band Pull Aparts: The Quick Fix

- Hold a resistance band at shoulder width with both hands.
- Pull the band apart by squeezing your shoulder blades together.
- Slowly return to the starting position.
- Do 2-3 sets of 10-15 repetitions during breaks.

Even something as simple as shoulder rolls done frequently in the van can maintain mobility:

- Lift your shoulders up towards your ears.
- Roll them back in a slow circular motion.
- Repeat 10 times, then reverse.

Sleep Debt and Adrenaline Timing

One of the most overlooked contributors to shoulder locking up is sleep—or lack thereof. Touring’s erratic schedule means musicians often get less than ideal rest. Combine that with adrenaline spikes from performing, and you have muscles that stay tight longer and don’t recover well.

Because sleep can’t be “banked” and adrenaline crashes are unavoidable, prioritize these habits:

1. Stick to a sleep schedule as much as possible.
2. Use calming aids like CBD tinctures or edibles from companies such as Joy Organics, which offer high-quality, THC-free options to reduce inflammation and promote relaxation.
3. Hydrate consistently—don’t wait until you’re thirsty.
4. Stretch gently before bed.

Neglecting these basics sets you up for muscle tension that turns into locked shoulders and longer recovery times.

Summary Table: Shoulder Health Checklist for Touring

Cause Prevention Tools/Techniques Load-in injuries Safe lifting techniques, clear communication Kinesiology tape to support joints Instrument-specific repetitive strain Posture awareness, regular breaks Lacrosse ball for shoulder knots Van travel stiffness Frequent movement, shoulder rolls Band pull aparts, shoulder rolls Sleep debt & adrenaline crashes Consistent sleep schedule, hydration Joy Organics CBD products for relaxation

Final Thoughts

Shoulder pain on tour is no joke, but it's 100% manageable if you understand why it happens and commit to preventive care. Avoid the macho mindset of "pushing through" and invest in safe lifting, consistent movement, and smart recovery tools like kinesiology tape, lacrosse balls, and resistance bands.

And hey—if you're struggling to wind down after a show, check out Joy Organics' line of premium CBD products. The right balance of rest, hydration, and self-care will keep your shoulders—and your whole body—ready for the next city's load-in.

Take care out there, stay safe, and keep those shoulders rolling!