

Anatomy



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Trapezius: Un-Trapping Your Traps

By Rachelle Clauson & Nicole Trombley
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GOING BEYOND THE BASICS:

Trapezius - A Big Muscle with a Bigger Story

TRAPEZIUS

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A Guide to Finding the Trapezius
Attachments that Anchor and
the Anatomy of Glide

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with our thanks

The images from the anatomy lab would not have been possible without the gracious gifts of the donors and their families to whom we are deeply grateful.

- *Rachelle and Nicole*



ABOUT

AnatomySCAPES™



Anatomy explorations for Bodyworkers

Dear Anatomy Lover,

We're so excited to collaborate on AnatomySCAPES together and share this work with YOU. We want more bodyworkers and movers to have access to both the anatomy lab *and* the latest research on fascia.

For us personally, studying anatomy — and fascial anatomy in particular — has taken our understanding of the human body so much deeper. And more importantly to us as bodyworkers, our touch skills have been taken to the next level. And our clients have noticed.

The anatomy lab has been the domain of a select few for centuries. That is shifting. And we get to be part of a generation that is changing who gets to do anatomy. We're committed to creating online and in lab educational opportunities that make this work more available. We hope you'll join us!

Love,
Rachelle & Nicole

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A N A T O M Y *for Touch*

GOING BEYOND THE BASICS:

TRAPEZIUS

A BIG MUSCLE WITH A BIGGER STORY

The trapezius is infamous for its role in chronic neck and shoulder pain. No stranger to bodyworkers, the traps are a regular target in our treatment rooms and take their fair share of session time. But how well do we really know them beyond the drawings in our books?

Taking a closer look at the traps —including where they live, what they do, and how they relate to their surroundings — can help us develop a functionally informed map that guides our work with them.



Trapezius overlying the latissimus dorsi muscles. Looking like a radiating yellow flame on a lavender sky, remnants of the subcutaneous fat shimmer along the spinous processes with the recognizable v-shape of the trapezius reaching upward and the latissimus dorsi spanning to the sides. The flat tendon of the lats can be seen peeking out from underneath the traps in bright white where they move in gliding relationship to each other.

Spanning the full width of the upper back with connections to the neck, shoulders, and all of the thoracic spine, it's no surprise how much attention this huge, superficial muscle of the back gets given the constant hit it takes just from the everyday activities of working, driving, and staring at our phones.

The traps are also a major shoulder mover and stabilizer, firing up to aid with lifting, throwing, and rowing motions. And if that wasn't enough, like a workaholic, the trapezius proudly includes "accessory breathing muscle" and "head stabilizer" in its resume.

How does it get everything done? Like any major achiever, the traps work best when they can get along well with others. The trapezius is a team player and has an impressive number of anatomical relationships that help it succeed. While knowing the traditional origins, insertions, and actions of the traps are helpful, there's a whole lot more to its anatomy story and we have a lot of questions. For example:

- What exactly is the nature of all these **anatomical relationships**?
- Does **fascia** play into how they do what they do so well?
- How did they develop **embryologically**?
- What is unique about them **neurologically**?
- What is their role when we are **in motion**?

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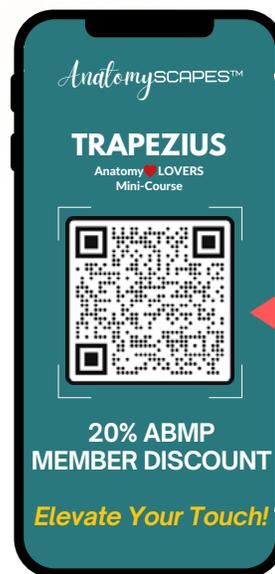


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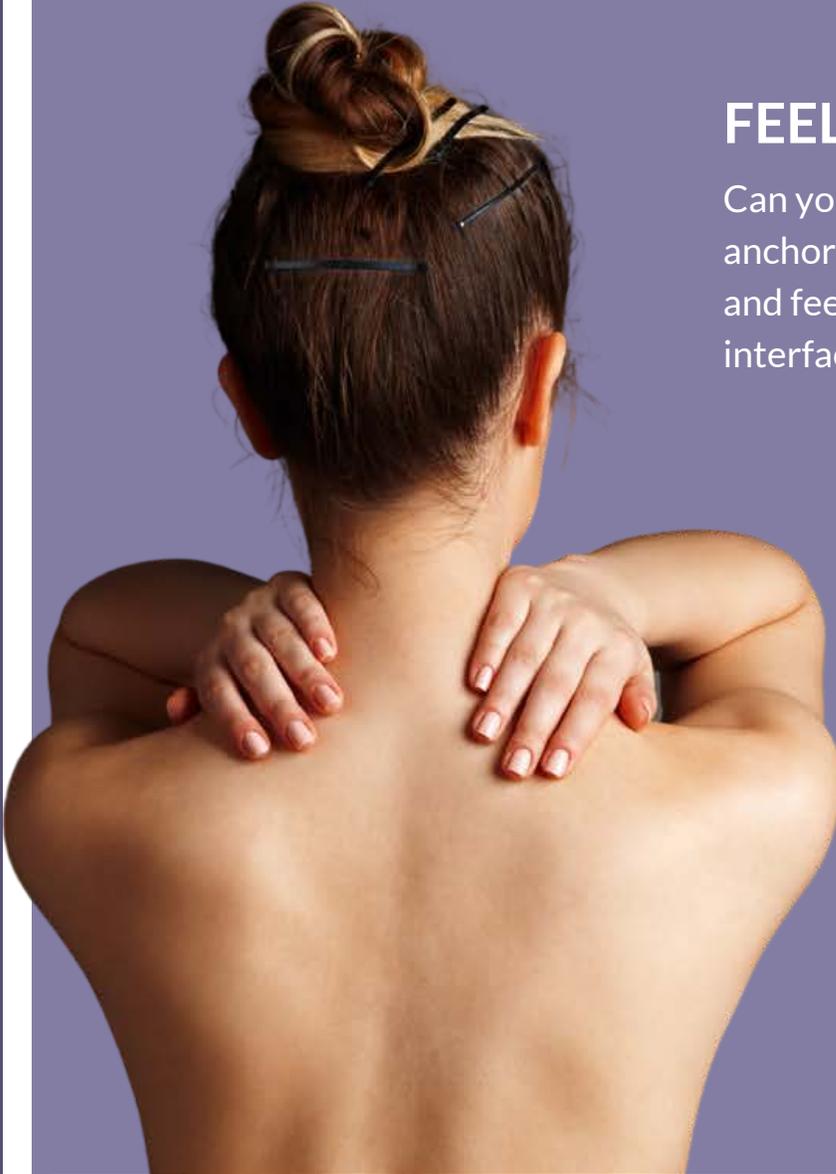
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Feel It! Upper Traps



FEEL IT FOR YOURSELF!

Can you find all the attachments that anchor your upper trapezius muscles and feel the anatomy of their gliding interfaces?

ANATOMY OF GLIDE:

- Gently grab the “scruff of the neck” and observe how you can move the upper trapezius slightly to the left and right of the midline before it becomes more anchored and stable at C7.
- Nodding your head forward and back, feel for the lateral edges of the traps and trace them from the occipital ridge down toward C7.
- Pinch the edges as they wing to the side and try sneaking underneath them with your thumbs. Notice if you can move them relative to the deeper cervical muscles.

ANATOMY REVIEW

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR UPPER TRAPS ANATOMY?

- **Origin:** medial third of the superior nuchal line, external occipital protuberance, nuchal ligament

- **Insertion:** lateral third of clavicle

- **Innervation:** accessory nerve (CN XI)



Nuchal Ligament

ANCHORS:

- Starting at your sternum, trace your right collar bone until you can feel the tissue thicken where the upper trapezius anchors into the lateral clavicle.
- Leaning your head away, follow the fibers up the slope of your right shoulder, gently strumming the edge of the traps as they make their way to the occipital ridge and feel where they anchor.

The upper trapezius drapes over the back of the posterior neck, yet it's not directly anchored to any of the cervical spinous processes until C7. Instead, the muscle anchors to the the nuchal ligament (nuchal means neck).

In our anatomy books, we see this ligament mostly represented as a flat two-dimensional structure connecting the two sides of the trapezius.

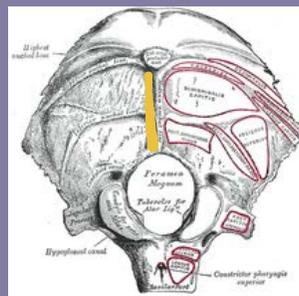
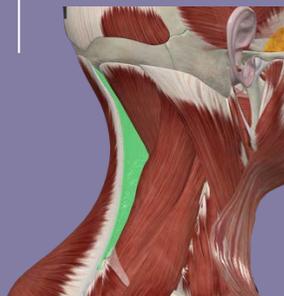
There's a lot more to it though, particularly when you peak beneath the trapezius.

- Superficially, the NL is more like a tendon that interdigitates with the upper trapezius's fibers, extending from the occipital protuberance to the spinous process of C7. It's about the width of your standard No. 2 pencil.

- The deeper part of the NL is better described as a membrane or even a fascial septum that connects its superficial part with the cervical vertebrae. This deeper part gives the trapezius a dynamic relationship with the cervical spine and skull.

An aponeurosis is a flattened tendon that has collagen fibers arranged in parallel, optimized to transmit force in a specific direction.

Highlighted here in green, we see the nuchal ligament as it extends from its attachment with trapezius deep to the cervical vertebrae.



The nuchal ligament has far more to it than we usually see in anatomical drawings. Note the extent of its attachment to the skull starting at the external occipital protuberance along the median nuchal line (in yellow).

- **Action:**
 - Scapulothoracic joint: draws scapula superomedially
 - Atlantooccipital joint: extension of head and neck, lateral flexion of head and neck (ipsilateral)
 - Altantoaxial joint: rotation of head (contralateral)pinous processes and supraspinous ligaments of vertebrae T4-T12

Middle Traps



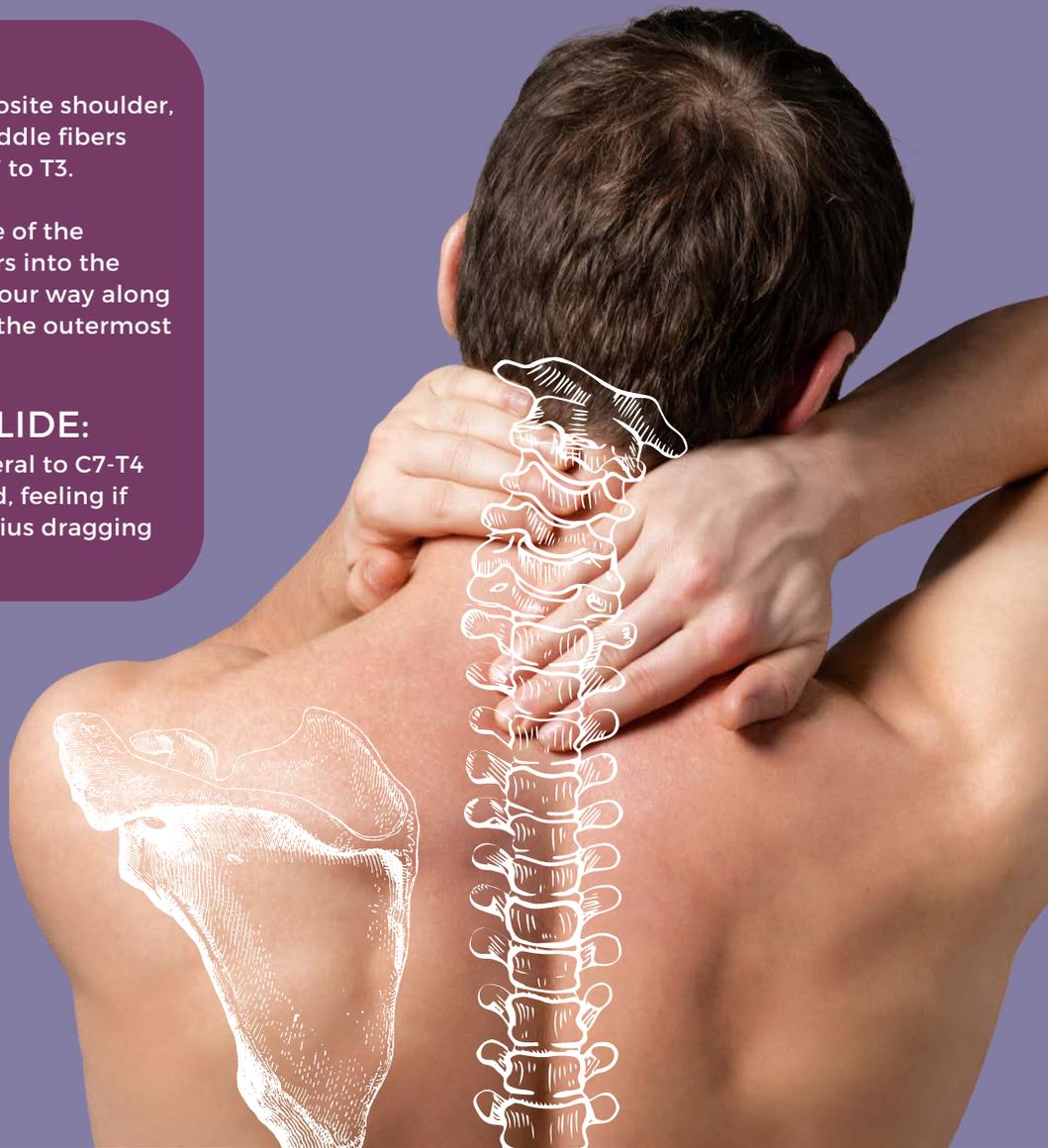
ANCHORS:

- Reaching across to the opposite shoulder, feel where the trapezius middle fibers anchor at the spine from C7 to T3.
- Next reach over to the spine of the scapula and sink your fingers into the superior edge as you walk your way along the bony ridge, laterally, to the outermost anchoring at the acromion.

ANATOMY OF GLIDE:

- Grasp the trapezius just lateral to C7-T4 and pull the muscle forward, feeling if you can perceive the trapezius dragging over the deeper muscles.

Can you find all the attachments that anchor your middle and lower trapezius muscles and feel the anatomy of their gliding interfaces?



ANATOMY REVIEW

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR MIDDLE TRAPS ANATOMY?

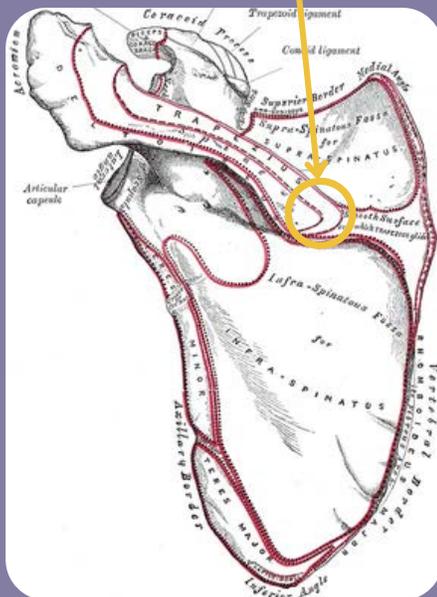
- **Origin:** spinous processes and supraspinous ligaments of vertebrae T1-T4 (or C7-T3)
- **Insertion:** medial acromial margin, superior crest of spine of scapula
- **Action:** Scapulothoracic joint: draws scapula medially
- **Innervation:** accessory nerve (CN XI)



Lower Traps

ANCHORS:

- On a partner, trace the shared anchorings of the trapezius and latissimus dorsi along the spinous processes of T7 to T12.
- Then palpate the lateral apex of the medial end of the spine of the scapula where the lower traps anchor into the infraspinatus fascia.



ANATOMY OF GLIDE:

- Trace the lateral edges of the lower trapezius from the medial spine of the scapula down to where they come to a point at T12.
- Next, see if you can move just the traps over the deeper latissimus dorsi. Can you scoop the edge of the traps medially away from the lats and then flatten them out again?
- Have your partner raise and lower their arm. Can you feel the gliding relationships of the muscles as they move?

ANATOMY REVIEW

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR LOWER TRAPS ANATOMY?

- **Origin:** spinous processes and supraspinous ligaments of vertebrae T4-T12
- **Insertion:** lateral apex of the medial end of scapular spine
- **Innervation:** accessory nerve (CN XI)
- **Action:** Scapulothoracic joint: Draws scapula inferomedially



from the authors

Congratulations on going on an adventure in human anatomy! We are thrilled to be a part of your education and learning process.

Here at AnatomySCAPES, we are dedicated to providing you with resources that will make your learning and understanding of human anatomy a rich and stress free experience. That's why we have plenty of amazing images and colorful writing to ensure that

your journey is as informed and exciting as possible! We have created the educational materials we wish we had when we began our journey. Welcome!

*Nicole &
Rachelle*

**NICOLE TROMBLEY
RACHELLE CLAUSON**





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