**Foam Rolling**

**What does foam rolling actually do?**

Think of it as ironing out the wrinkles in your rumpled musculature. Joe Hashey, C.S.C.S., owner of Synergy Athletics, explains: "Foam rolling smooths and lengthens your muscles, and breaks up adhesions and scar tissue." Another benefit is that it helps your muscles relax by activating the sensory receptors connecting your muscle fibers to your tendons. The net effect is better blood circulation, which in turn speeds workout recovery and boosts performance. If you hit a sore spot, hold it there for 15 to 30 seconds—you found a tight area that needs special attention, says Hashey. Yes, foam rolling can be painful, but you need only 5 to 10 minutes to reap the benefit. Just as important as how you roll is when you roll: After a workout is best, followed by a static stretch of the muscle, says Hashey. This helps your muscles return to the proper length and recover even faster because it can prevent the buildup of scar tissue.

A.  Exercise induces microtears and swelling in muscle fibers, which impinge on nerves and vessels. Over time, this can develop into adhesions and scar tissue.

B.  Foam rolling helps smooth out these obstructions and break down adhesions, helping to increase blood-flow within the muscle.

**What Is a Foam Roller, How Do I Use It, and Why Does It Hurt?**

[**Self-myofascial release**](http://breakingmuscle.com/mobility-recovery/does-foam-rolling-really-work)**, also known as “foam rolling,” has transformed from a once**

**mysterious technique used only by professional athletes, coaches, and therapists to a familiar everyday practice for people at all levels of fitness.** Recent information, technology, and affordable products have introduced an increasing array of training and recovery methods to the average person.

**Self-myofascial release is a fancy term for self-massage to release muscle tightness or trigger points.** This method can be performed with a foam roller, lacrosse ball, Theracane, or your own hands. By applying pressure to specific points on your body you are able to aid in the recovery of muscles and assist in returning them to normal function. Normal function means your muscles are elastic, healthy, and ready to perform at a moment’s notice.

**Do I Have Tight Muscles or Trigger Points?**

Trigger points are specific “knots” that form in muscles. They are unique and can be identified because they will refer pain. **Pain referral, for our purposes, can most easily be described as the pain felt when pressure is applied to one area of the body, but the pain is felt or radiated in another area.** A common example of a trigger point is felt while foam rolling your iliotibial (IT) band as it causes pain to radiate up to the hip or all the way down the leg to the ankle. When rolling or working on tight/sore muscles you will experience discomfort or pain. Think of it like the pain you get while stretching. It should be uncomfortable, but not unbearable, and when you are done it should feel better.

**Why Am I Doing Something That Hurts?**

For many, deep tissue massage is easy to understand. Ideally someone is able to work out the knots in your muscles, and it is commonly known this process may be uncomfortable and at times painful. **Self-myofascial release provides the user the ability to control the healing and recovery process by applying pressure in precise locations, because only you can feel exactly what is happening**. It is always recommended to consult with your physician or physical therapist for therapeutic/sharp pain and receive approval before starting self-myofascial release. For most people you will be cleared immediately and your doctor will encourage the practice.

**Releasing trigger points helps to reestablish proper movement patterns and pain free movement, and ultimately, to enhance performance.** Utilizing stretching alone is not always enough to release muscles tightness, which is why foam rollers have thrived on the mass market. Imagine a bungee cord with a knot tied into it and then envision stretching the cord. This creates tension, stretching the unknotted portion of the muscle and the attachment points. The knot, however, has remained unaltered. Foam rolling can assist in breaking up these muscle knots, resuming normal blood flow and function. The goal to any corrective or recovery technique is to get you back to the point of normal functioning, as if nothing was ever wrong**.** When was the last time you trained like you were a teenager, going hard without a second thought, and injuries were something that only happened due to physical trauma like a 250lb linebacker hitting you?

**What Causes Trigger Points and Tight Muscles?**

Both have the same contributing factors including training, flexibility, movement patterns, posture, nutrition, hydration, rest, stress, and other lifestyle factors. **Our bodies learn to compensate for what we throw at them every day, but we can exceed our ability to recover via too many intense workouts, poor posture, and other lifestyle factors.** This is when you need assistance using recovery techniques or through seeing a professional. If you lived a perfect life with everything in balance, you would theoretically never have either of these conditions, however I’ve yet to meet that person.

**How Does Self-Myofascial Release Work?**

Deep compression helps to break up or relax tight muscles and adhesions formed between muscle layers and their surroundings. Imagine you are tenderizing your own muscles. They should be soft and supple like a baby’s muscles. **However, if our muscles are not taken care of properly we can experience loss of flexibility, adhesions, and painful movement.** The compression allows normal blood flow to return and restoration of healthy tissue. Our bodies naturally want to be healthy and strong, but sometimes an extra boost is needed to achieve optimal muscle and tissue health.

**How Do I Know What to Foam Roll and How to Do It?**

Areas to focus on can be identified in two different ways. The first is through screenings. **If you have followed the last two articles -** [**squat screening**](http://breakingmuscle.com/mobility-recovery/why-screening-and-corrective-exercise-should-be-foundation-every-exercise-program) **and** [**hip hinge screening**](http://breakingmuscle.com/mobility-recovery/establishing-your-drive-train-screening-and-correcting-hip-hinge) **- and have had struggles with either movement, you should include foam rolling in your workout and recovery program.** You may target specific areas/muscles that relate to the movements you are focusing on. If after using the foam roller your movement improves, you have a more specific strategy to follow. Secondly, trigger points and tight muscles can be found through self-exploration, utilizing the list of techniques below and exploring each one.

To foam roll properly, apply moderate pressure to a specific muscle or muscle group using the roller and your bodyweight. You should roll slowly, no more than one inch per second. **When you find areas that are tight or painful, pause for several seconds and relax as much as possible.** You should slowly start to feel the muscle releasing, and after 5-30 seconds the discomfort or pain should lessen. If an area is too painful to apply direct pressure, shift the roller and apply pressure on the surrounding area and gradually work to loosen the entire area. The goal is to restore healthy muscles - it is not a pain tolerance test. You may also use other objects to work on muscles such as a tennis ball, lacrosse ball, Theracane, or Trigger Point Therapy Kit.

**Never roll a joint or bone. Avoid rolling your lower back.** To target these muscles I recommend [using tennis or lacrosse balls](http://breakingmuscle.com/video/breaking-muscle-video-self-applied-acupressure-neck-and-back-relief). If you are having [issues with your neck](http://breakingmuscle.com/mobility-recovery/4-great-tools-stretching-and-mobility), refer these issues to an appropriate medical professional, as these areas they can be more sensitive and require more advanced attention.