

Rolling On

By Derek Shore

Even in these economically difficult times when governments are bailing out multi-billion dollar companies but leave you empty handed, you can be comforted by the fact that there are indeed products and services that will leave you feeling like a Berkshire Hathaway shareholder....well, not really but you get the point. Enter the "roller".

I have been training for over 10 years now and have seen a lot of fads come and go, but every once in awhile I'm happily surprised. The long, cylindrical piece of hardened foam obviously named the "foam roller" just happens to be one of them.

What does it do?

Use #1: Break down adhesions

Michael Clark of NASM fame is credited for popularizing the roller. Initially its' purpose was to relieve individuals and athletes of sore spots, otherwise known as trigger points. By applying one's bodyweight on the roller, the individual could slowly apply pressure in order to break down adhesions or sore spots.

Use #2: Increase range of motion (r.o.m)

When used in conjunction with a solid stretching program, it allows the individual to improve the range of motion of the muscle(s) being addressed. By stimulating the muscle being "rolled", the Golgi Tendon Organ immediately senses tension and notifies the muscle to relax, which in turn enables the muscle to increase its' r.o.m in a passive setting.

Use #3: Correct postural imbalances

For this one I'll provide the Cole's Notes version: Stretch short, tight muscles, and strengthen long, weak muscles. 'Nuff said.

Just show me the bloody exercises already!

Note: Those with chronic circulatory problems or fibromyalgia should NOT use foam rollers!

The technique is straightforward. If you are a newbie to the foam rolling world, start off by gradually applying more and more pressure with each rolling session. Always start at the end of the muscle closest to the centre of your body, and move away in slow, short movements. Whenever you come across a hot spot or sore spot, stop and hold that position for 10-15 seconds before moving on.

Iliotibial Band/Tensor Fascia Latae

Support your weight on your hands and free foot. Apply pressure starting at your hip, gradually rolling towards your knee while making sure to stop at trigger points.



Quadriceps

Support your weight on your hands/forearms. Once again, apply pressure starting at your hips and gradually roll towards the knee ensuring to stop at hot spots.



Piriformis

Sitting on the roller, cross your legs and tilt in the direction your knee is pointing to. In other words, if you have crossed your right leg over the left you would then tilt to the RIGHT. Proceed to roll up and down targeting the upper portion of your gluteus maximus. Repeat on the other side.



While this doesn't compare with an actual massage from a certified massage therapist, it will definitely enhance your workouts and all around well-being.

About the Author

Derek Shore is a former strength and conditioning coach with the Philadelphia Phillies Baseball Club and specializes in training strength and power athletes at the high school and collegiate levels.