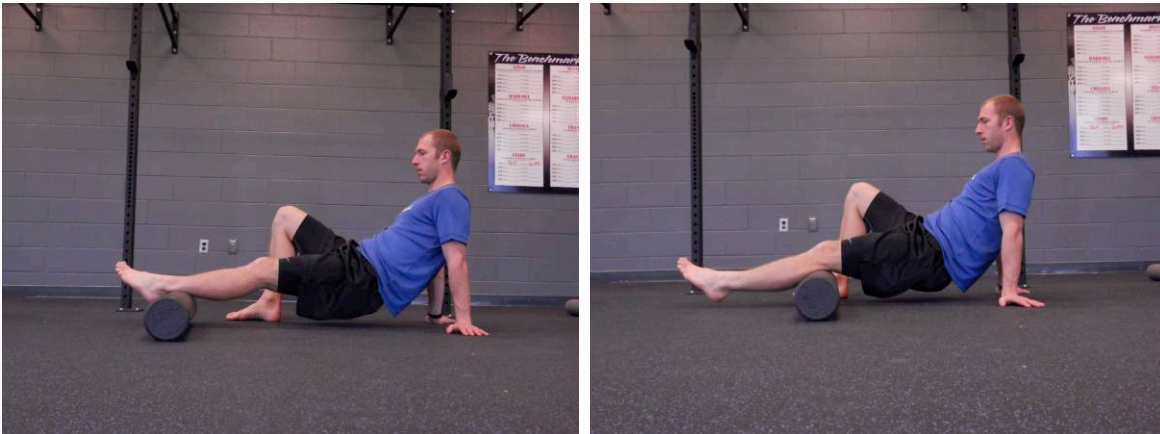

ROLL YOUR OWN

Breaking Muscle – the fine art of self-myofascial release

Self-myofascial release, 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, massage stick, 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.



Left photo: Calf bottom. Right photo: Calf top.

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.



Left photo: Chest - front delt. Right photo: Lats.

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?



Left photo: Hip adductor. Right photo: Hip extensor - glute.



Left photo: Hip flexor. Right photo: Inner quad.

What Causes Trigger Points and Tight Muscles?

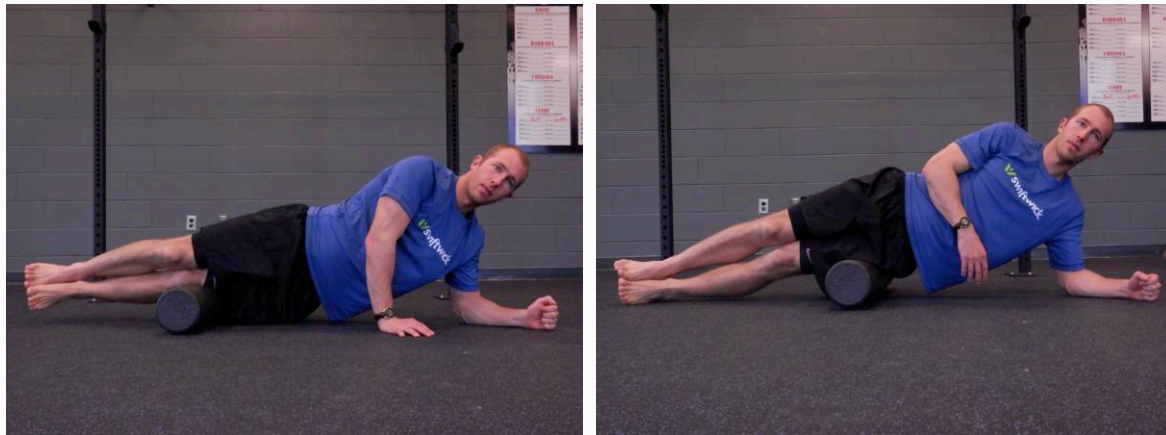
Both have the same contributing factors including training, flexibility, movement patterns, posture, nutrition, hydration, rest, stress, and other lifestyle factors. **Our bodies learn to compensate for what we throw at them every day, but we can exceed our ability to recover via too many intense workouts, 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 deep compression of self-myofascial release allows normal blood flow to return and the restoration of healthy tissue. The body naturally wants to be healthy and strong, but sometimes an extra boost is needed to achieve optimal muscle and tissue health.



Left photo: IT band bottom. Right photo: IT band top.

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

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 or lacrosse ball, or you can 'unweight' the area you are rolling, rather than using full body weight.

Never roll a joint or bone. Avoid rolling your lower back. To target these muscles I recommend [using tennis or lacrosse balls](#). If you are having issues with your neck, refer these issues to an appropriate medical professional, as these areas they can be more sensitive and require more advanced attention.



Left photo: Lacrosse ball - hip. Right photo: Lacrosse ball - shoulder blade.

What Happens After Foam Rolling?

You may be sore the next day. **It should feel as if your muscles have been worked/released, however you should not push yourself to the point of excessive soreness.** Drink plenty of water, get enough sleep, and eat clean. This will help to flush your system and fuel your muscles more effectively. Give it 24-48 hours before focusing on the same area again.



Left photo: Mid-back. Right photo: Upper back.