

Ready to roll

Foam rolling helps relax muscles and improve flexibility

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

The fitness market is evolving and the increasing demand from fitness enthusiasts is giving rise to newer equipment and newer ways to exercise. Foam rolling is the latest technique to gain popularity among fitness enthusiasts across the world. This technique is believed to improve flexibility, tone muscles and help rehabilitation after a workout. But what really is foam rolling and how is it done?

Relief for sore muscles

Foam rolling is a massaging technique done using foam rollers. It can play an important role in post-exercise rehabilitation and also prepping the muscles before a workout. But one needs to do it right. A fitness analysis by a trained professional to see a person's endurance and fitness levels is a must before using foam rollers.

Foam rollers are useful for myofascial release, which is a form of massage where the fascia of the muscle tissues are worked on, so as to get rid of the knots formed due to constant load on the muscles. "Myofascial release is performed by trained masseurs but when it is to be done on a regular basis, one can opt for self-myofascial release or foam rolling as it is commonly termed. This is a massaging technique that requires a sturdy foam roller to open up the knots in muscle tissues," explains Manoj Sarangapani, fitness coach, Obino.

According to fitness experts, a

foam roller is a valuable piece of equipment for exercise and rehabilitation. "These are usually long and cylindrical; they come in many shapes, sizes and varying textures. Foam rollers are inexpensive and easy to use. Therefore, they can be used for many purposes including dealing with different ailments, improving sports performance and helping patients troubled by back pain, joint pain, etc.," says Deepak Jha, fitness expert and consultant, Medanta-The Medicity. "They can be easily used for self-massage that will help soothe tight, sore areas and speed up muscle recovery."

Foam rollers are commonly used as therapy either just before a workout or after. "When foam rollers are used before a workout, they mobilise and prep your muscles to get stretched. During the workout, foam rollers can be used to open up hamstrings and make your body more supple. When used post a workout, they can be used to treat knots created in the muscles," explains grandmaster Akshar, chairman, course director, Akshar Yoga.

Foam rollers naturally respond to the body's pressure. As you roll over tight spots or trigger points, the muscle relaxes. Especially for tight spots, applying pressure at a constant rate might work better than simply rolling back and forth. "Place one, or both hands on top of a foam roller during a full plank or push up, or slide your roller under your toes during either exercise. This will force your body to



Grandmaster Akshar on Foam roller and flexibility

work harder to stabilise. While supporting your body, place the target muscle on top of the foam roller and move yourself over it. The pressure applied by your own body weight presses out the soft tissue, releasing tension and stimulating blood flow along with ironing out any sticking points," opines Akshay Verma, co-

founder, Fitpass.

Fitness enthusiast Leander Wheatley, who works in the engineering and base maintenance department, Jet Airways, is an avid user of foam rollers. "Foam rolling is great at correcting muscle imbalances. Intra-set foam rolling for overactive muscles dampens that neurological

response and disperses the load on to the muscles it's intended for and helps recovery. So basically it can be used by anybody in fitness as a general massage to loosen tight muscles," he says. "I use a foam roller after every cycle ride/workout and each time I use it I feel as if I have had a quick sports massage."

Many other benefits

Foam rolling works as a deep tissue massage and will help you become more coordinated as you incorporate it into your workout or even yoga routine. "Foam rolling helps stretch your tight muscles, tendons and ligaments. It releases muscle fatigue, prevents sports injuries, helps recover more



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more than 40 per cent. There are different types of rollers. The softer ones are basically for general massage and the harder ones work better for deep tissue massage.”

Improves flexibility

Foam rolling increases flexibility by improving blood circulation in the affected part of the body. It increases the range of motion and enhances performance of the targeted muscle enabling it to improve its capability to its full extent.

Foam rolling, however, does not alone improve flexibility. “After foam rolling if you do some static stretching, there can be some improvement in flexibility. Incorporating foam rolling into your fitness routine will make you feel relaxed and less stiff. And if your muscles are less stiff, your performance in your workout is a lot better and you are safer from injuries,” says Shwetambari Shetty, zumba master trainer and fitness expert, Cult. Vasudha Aggarwal and Niran Ponnappa, founders, The Fit District, believe if foam rolling is done regularly and consistently (at least thrice a week), you will definitely see positive changes in your flexibility,

workout, muscles can ache for days. Foam rollers can be used to speed up the recovery process. It can be used to correct alignment, increase neuromuscular coordination and improve motor control. It is an added therapy that can help enhance core muscles as well as target the whole body.” Prosenjit Biswas, fitness manager, Skulpt adds, “Foam rollers are normally used to increase elasticity of body joints and connective tissues. It can reduce stiffness and soreness by

Dos and Don'ts

- › Never perform any routine without professional assistance; always use foam rollers under expert guidance.
- › Individuals with musculoskeletal pain must consult a physiotherapist.
- › Never roll your joints or bones.
- › Don't roll your lower back. Use a tennis ball instead.
- › Roll slowly—no more than one inch per second. Never roll in a fast back-and-forth motion.
- › Wait 24-48 hours between foam rolling sessions. Your body needs time to recover.
- › Refrain from using this device during pregnancy.
- › People with back injuries must use foam rollers with care.

quickly from injuries and increases range of motion and flexibility. You can give yourself a soothing abhyanga and follow it up with foam rolling to just get deeper into releasing tension and toxins,” says Jeevika Tyagi, CEO, AllAyurveda.com.

Recovery after exercise is faster with foam rollers. This technique also helps tackle stiffness. Says Dr Hardik Patel, head of physiotherapy, Fortis Hiranandani Hospital, Vashi, “Post a



Obino

and in your performance of various exercises, be it weight training or metabolic conditioning.

Points to note

Your first time with a foam roller could be painful. It is just like getting a really firm massage on sore spots. Once you work out the kinks in your muscles and ligaments, you will start looking forward to a foam roller session. Never use a foam roller on an injured muscle. “Consult your doctor or physical therapist before using it for exercise or stretching purposes. Know that the foam roller is not intended for use on some joints such as knees and elbows. It targets muscles and soft tissue, so place it on the muscle before starting your massage routine,” advises Manmeet Manchanda, fitness trainer, Anytime Fitness.

Before using this equipment, it is imperative to research on different types of foam rollers. There are different lengths and diameters available;

How to correct muscle imbalances and exercise with foam rollers

BY JEEVIKA TYAGI, CEO, AllAyurveda.com

Reverse plank for thighs and calves

For those who have been working on their hamstrings, this will feel like a massage therapist releasing tension from their calves. Place the roller under the back of the thighs or calves. Slowly straighten your leg, and lift your heel off the floor. Press your hands down and raise your buttocks. Rock your body forward and backward, with the foam roller massaging your thighs and calves.

Hip/ Glute release

Ease stress build-up in your hips and glutes by sitting on the foam roller and resting the meaty part of the muscle group. Bend your legs,

while keeping your feet flat on the floor. You can also use one leg at a time and alternate between them. Keep moving in the forward and backward direction while rolling the rollers across your buttocks.

Thoracic spine

Lie down facing upwards with your feet flat, width aligned with your shoulders. Keep the foam roller centered under your shoulder blades so that it is perpendicular and forms a “T” with your body. Extend your arms outward at a 45-degree angle. Keeping your sacrum or lower back firmly on the ground, reach arms back and then up again.

there are even half rollers that lay flat on the floor for improved balance. “Most rollers are roughly six inches in diameter; lengths vary from 12 to 36 inches. If you're rolling your upper back and shoulders, a longer roller ensures you won't fall off the ends. For single-arm and single-leg rolling, a shorter roller should suffice. A shorter roller is also more convenient to take with you to work or the gym,” advises holistic health guru, Dr Mickey Mehta.

This technique can be used in many conditions to correct alignment, reduce pain and stiffness. It is, however, better that senior citizens and people with severe osteoporosis avoid this form of exercise. “Find areas that are tight and cause pain, apply moderate pressure using the foam roller and body weight. Move slowly at an approximate rate of one inch per second. When you find areas that are more tight and painful, pause and relax. You should feel the muscle relaxing and after a while the pain should lessen. If the trigger point is very painful to work with at first, move the roller

in the surrounding areas and slowly release, moving in from there,” advises Sarangapani.

The placement of the roller and the right movement of the muscles are extremely important. “Hence, prior to using the roller, the cause of the pain has to be analysed by detailed evaluation as at times the site of cause of pain and the area of the body where the pain is perceived may be different. Good posture while using the roller is mandatory. The movement of the muscle over the roller should be very slow and one should avoid staying on the painful area for very long,” says Dr Yashoda Wagh, physiotherapist, Bhatia Hospital, Mumbai.

One may feel some soreness the next day after foam rolling. Hydrating yourself with plenty of water, eating clean and getting good sleep will help flush out the toxins from your system and make your muscles feel rejuvenated and ready for work again. Foam rolling can also be done by someone who has a sedentary lifestyle, as it can help reduce stiffness and improve mobility. □



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