

## Foam Roller: Fad or Fact?

By Alisha Mohamad

The foam roller is a tool that when mentioned 10 years ago, very few recognized. However, it seems to be gaining a lot more steam recently. They're seen in most fitness centers, at department stores, you can even find some at Winners! And of course, they're a frequently-used tool at most rehab facilities. But how do you use them? Are they beneficial? Do they really live up to all the hype?

With the snow and cold of winter becoming a distant memory, it seems like there are far more people finding themselves wanting to go out for a walk or a jog, take the bike out for a spin, or hit the mountains for a hike. But with the sudden burst of activity comes an increase in the risk of injuries, especially knee and hip pain. Many of these injuries can be prevented with regular foam rolling.

Foam rollers are used to loosen up many of the muscle groups that are responsible for the activities mentioned. As a result, the initial few sessions can be quite uncomfortable and you may feel some residual tenderness over the areas rolled. However the most important thing to remember if you're interested in using the roller is that it will be most effective if used regularly and the more often you use it, the less painful it will be. The following are pictures and instructions on how to use the foam roller for different muscles.

**IT Band** (tissue on the lateral/outside part of the upper leg)



Place your foam roller on the floor. Take a side plank position with the outside of one hip over the foam roller and your other leg in front for support. Roll the entire outside of your leg from your pelvis to your knee in an up and down motion.

**Quads** (large muscles on the front of the thigh)



Place your foam roller on the floor and lie on your stomach with the front of one thigh over the foam roller and the other leg on the floor for support. Roll the entire front of the thigh from the top of the hip to the top of the knee cap in an up and down motion.

**Hamstrings** (large muscles on the back of the thigh)



Place a foam roller on the floor and sit on the floor supporting yourself with your hands. Place the back of one thigh over the foam roller and the other leg on the floor for support. To increase the pressure, place the other leg on top of the leg you are rolling. Roll the entire back of your thigh from the bottom of the buttock to your knee in an up and down motion.

**Glutes** (muscles of the buttock)



Place your foam roller on the floor and sit on it having one foot over the opposite knee in a figure 4 position. During the stretch, roll along your buttock in a front to back motion from your lower back to the bottom of the buttock. Then place the leg straight out in front of you and roll the outside part of the buttock in the same manner.

**Calf** (large muscles on the back of the lower leg)



Place the foam roller between the Achilles tendon and calf muscle. Cross the other leg over the leg being treated to increase the pressure. Roll the entire calf in an up and down motion. Rotate your leg inwards to focus on the inner part of the calf and outwards to focus on the outer part of the calf.

With all of the above exercises, it is important to maintain a tight core to prevent any low back injuries. It will also make it easier to tolerate these exercises if you try to relax the muscle group that you are working on. If you feel an area that is especially tender, try to roll back and forth over that area to release the tension.

Another fan favourite exercise involving the foam roller is one for the thoracic spine (mid-back). This exercise can be great for relieving stiffness and tension in the area.



Lay over a foam roller positioned at shoulder blade level. Place your hands behind your head to support your neck and roll your body on the foam roller from the middle of your back to the base of your neck. Try to extend/arch backwards as you roll to get the most benefit.

For more exercises with or without the foam roller, please stop by any Momentum Health clinic for a free 15 minute consult or book an assessment! Request an appointment and find the location closest to you through our Momentum Health App or at [info@momentumhealth.ca](mailto:info@momentumhealth.ca).