

PRODUCT REVIEW: The Foam Roller

BY: Daniela Tempesta

A relatively mobile piece of equipment that comes in a variety of sizes and densities, foam rollers are also used for more than just muscular release. They can be used to increase flexibility and soft tissue mobility, balance, coordination and stabilization. Here is a closer look at what actually happens in the body while using a foam roller and how that can be beneficial to your client's overall health and wellness, whether in group fitness or personal training.

FLEXIBILITY & SOFT TISSUE MOBILITY

In essence, rolling with the foam roller stimulates autogenic inhibition of the muscle spindles. By putting pressure on a tender part of your muscle (ie. a sore spot you are experiencing from a workout or acute or chronic injury), you send signals to the golgi tendon organs (sensory receptors within a muscle tendon that sense tension) to communicate with the muscle spindles, which also sit within a muscle, to inhibit their action (a naturally involuntary response) thus releasing the pressure in that area¹. In other words, the foam roller puts pressure on the sore spot which triggers

the golgi tendon organs to tell the muscle spindles to relax and relieve the tension in that area. It's recommended to use the roller to 'massage' tender areas, however, I put 'massage' in quotes because, well, it may not actually feel like a relaxing massage! The rule of thumb is if it hurts a bit, you've hit the right spot. Stay on that spot for a few seconds before moving on to another problem area. As with traditional resistance training, it is recommended that you do multiple sets of 15-30 seconds.

BALANCE, COORDINATION & STABILIZATION

Foam rollers can be used for virtually any exercise or muscle(s) you can think of, but they are generally used to work the lower body. As previously mentioned, there are many different types of rollers but the two most common ones are either full (complete circle) or half (divided right down the middle).

Use the half roller to promote stronger stabilizing muscles by creating an unstable surface, much like many other balance training equipment. And just like those

other pieces of equipment that allow you to progress, you can progress your training with foam rollers simply by 1) flipping the half roller flat-side up to create an even more unstable surface, 2) moving from the smaller diameter roller (standard is 4") to the larger one (standard is 6") which increases the space between you and the floor and thus increases the level of difficulty of an exercise¹. Exercises to promote balance, coordination and stabilization include: standing on the roller, standing on the roller with your eyes closed (stay near a wall for this one!) and squatting while on the roller.

For upper body work with a focus on core stabilization, the roller is often used to lie on. Your core muscles are all firing to contract and keep you from falling off the roller - no small feat! Try this one yourself: simply lie supine (that's tummy-side up) on the full roller and increase the level of intensity by varying your base of support: feet wide on the floor, then bring them together, then take one leg off at a time and balance for a few seconds.

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Progressions with arms and adding other equipment such as medicine balls, dumbbells and kettle bells can be a great goal for your clients to strive towards.

WAYS TO INCORPORATE FOAM ROLLERS WITH YOUR CLIENTS

Many facilities now offer foam rollers as part of their holistic/wellness classes such as yoga and Pilates. If you have this kind of access, I recommend using the rollers in the last little bit of class to work on core and stabilization or even during segments of lower body training in the middle of the class. You can also offer foam roller classes or encourage your facility to host a

workshop for members to get familiar with them. If you're really ambitious, you can also bring them to class.

THE VERDICT?

I love the foam roller! I think it's an innovative way to use a piece of equipment through various functionalities that are synonymous with everyday activities. It is super light-weight, portable (if you purchase a shorter length) and is a great way to get a quick 'massage' anywhere, anytime. Your clients will benefit from using the foam roller because they will get to know their own bodies better by rolling on it, and they'll challenge balance and coordination. I strongly recommend taking a workshop or

certification. This will protect your clients from injury and you from the headache that might result from venturing outside of your scope of practice. •

Resource:

1. *Foam Roller Fitness*, (Erb, E. (2006)

Daniela Tempesta is a BCR-PA Trainer of Fitness Leaders, Consultant & Fitness Champion. Previously the Director of Group Exercise of a large women's-only fitness chain, she has now transitioned into consulting, presenting and authoring fitness resources. To contact Daniela, visit her website at: www.danielatempesta.com or email her at danielatempesta@shaw.ca



“I LOVE THE FOAM ROLLER!”

