



Spotlight on Foam Rolling

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I've experienced firsthand that our bodies don't always do as we ask. Sore and stiff muscles, achy joints, and that *"what's wrong with my body?"* feeling from time to time. One great tool that has always helped me is the foam roller. Foam rolling is used in recovery and mobility but there's more to the foam roller than you may know.

What is foam rolling, really?

Foam rolling is a form of release, using your own body weight and pressure to target muscles and connective tissue. Fascia surrounds muscles, nerves, and joints, and when it becomes tight or restricted, movement can feel stiff or painful.

What is fascia?

Fascia is the body's internal connective tissue. It's like a flexible and stretchy web that holds everything together. It provides structure and support to the body which allows smooth movement.

Foam rolling helps by:

- Releasing muscle tension
- Improving joint range of motion
- Increasing blood flow
- Helping muscles recover faster

The Blood Flow

One thing people don't realise is how much foam rolling affects circulation. When you create pressure with a foam roller, you compress the tissue and blood vessels in the moment. Once you release that pressure, fresh blood rushes back into the area. This helps deliver oxygen and nutrients to the muscle while clearing out waste products.

Why this matters:

- Improved circulation can help with soreness
- Muscles may feel warmer and looser
- Recovery after workouts can feel faster and better

Often you will get a warm feeling after rolling, that's blood flow doing its job.

Why foam rolling can hurt (and why that's normal)

In my experience foam rolling isn't always comfortable.

It can be slightly painful at times.

This discomfort often comes from:

- Tight or overused muscles
- Trigger points (knots in the muscle)
- Restricted fascia

When you roll over these areas, your nervous system reacts. The sharp or intense sensation you feel is your body way of saying *"this area needs attention."*

Important to know:

- Pain does not mean injury
- Discomfort should feel intense but manageable
- You should still be able to breathe normally
- If it feels unbearable or causes sharp pain, that's your sign to reduce pressure or stop the rolling.

Foam rolling is adaptable

One of the best things about foam rolling is how adaptable it is. You don't need a perfect routine or long sessions for it to be effective.

Some days might look like:

- 5 minutes of gentle rolling while watching TV
- Light pressure to relax tight areas

Other days might include:

- Slower, deeper rolling after a workout
- Pausing on tight spots for 20–30 seconds

The goal is to do what is best for you and your body, and it should help everything feel a little better than it did before.

Everyday foam roller alternatives

Rolled up towel:

- Best for neck, calves, hamstrings and lower back
- Great for beginners who want less pressure
- Easy to adjust thickness

Metal cylinder water bottle (not a square or soft plastic one!):

- Best for feet, calves and forearms Offers targeted pressure for sore spots
- Cold water bottles add a bonus cooling effect too

Sock + Ball Combo:

- Put a tennis ball inside a sock and tie the end
- Helps control pressure
- Perfect for rolling against a wall
- Easy to adjust intensity

Final thoughts

Foam rolling doesn't have to be over complicated or scary. With some good tools and spare minutes, you can help give your body support, improve movement (even if it hurts a little in the moment).

Sometimes, feeling better starts with slowing things down, rolling them out, and listening to what your body needs.

References:

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- **Healthline.** (2023). Foam roller benefits: Can it help with soreness and flexibility?
- **Time Health.** (2017, February 17). Why foam rolling works and how to do it. *Time*.

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