

Foam Roller Exercises

The foam roller is a useful tool for improving flexibility, balance, strength and muscular awareness. For starters the rolling motion allows for the release of muscle tightness in muscles that are difficult to reach with ordinary stretches. The elevation of the foam roller allows for increased extension in the shoulder and chest area allowing for a better stretch. In addition, the unstable cylindrical shape of the roller provides a challenging environment for abdominal strengthening exercises.

For proper use avoid rolling on tendons, joints, and bony structures. For each rolling exercise hold the position on the roller where tension is felt until the tight muscle releases or for 1 minute, whichever occurs first.



Chest Stretch - Sit on one end of the roller and then lay back. Your head should be resting on the roller and your knees should be bent with your feet flat on the floor shoulder width apart to provide balance. Bring both arms up in front of you and bend both elbows to 90 degrees, forearms will be parallel to the ground. Keeping your elbows bent, open your arms out to the sides and relax. Let gravity stretch the muscles of your chest and shoulders.



Back Stretch - Sit on one end of the roller and lay back so that your head is supported on the roller, and your spine is in line with the roller. Bend knees to provide balance. Bring your arms straight up so that they are pointing towards the ceiling. Now drop your arms over your head and allow gravity to cause a stretch. This will stretch your latissimus dorsi muscles and help extend your thoracic spine.



Thoracic Spine Mobility - Lay on the roller so that your spine is perpendicular with the roll, bend knees and lift hips off ground while maintaining a flat body position. Roll back and forth from the top of the shoulders (NOT on the neck) down to the bottom of the rib cage. This exercise will help improve the mobility of the thoracic spine by encouraging movement in each segment.



Glute Roll - Sit on the roller with your legs slightly extended in front of you and your body leaning back. Placing your weight on either your left glute or your right glute, roll across the gluteal muscles. Take longer through the tighter areas.



Abdominal Strengthening Exercise (Beginner) - Sit on one end of the roller and lay back so that your head is again supported on the roller. Reach your arms out to each side like a T. Have your knees shoulder width apart and bent approximately 90 degrees with your feet flat on the ground. Begin by tightening your stomach muscles trying to pull your belly button to the back of your spine without tucking your tailbone under. Maintaining the neutral position of the spine slowly lift one knee up till your thigh is perpendicular to the ground then lower the leg back to the starting position. Alternate legs until fatigued.



Abdominal Strengthening Exercise (Advanced) - Lay in the same body position as in the beginner exercise, maintaining the neutral spine position. Begin with both knees bent and legs up so that your thighs are at 90 degrees to your body. Slowly lower one leg towards the floor. Without touching the floor, lift the leg back to the starting position and alternate legs. Maintain the neutral spine position throughout the entire exercise.



For both abdominal exercises:

* in order to increase difficulty to an intermediate level move your hands from the straight out to the sides (T-position) to down by your sides (a).

** For even more difficulty reach your arms directly over your head (b).



ITB Roll - Lay on the roller so that the roll sits under the side of the leg just below the hip joint. Support the weight of your body on your hands, and opposite leg (which is crossed out in front of the leg on the roll). This exercise helps loosen up your Ilio-Tibial Band (ITB) which runs down the outside of your leg from your hip to your knee. Roll back and forth from below the hip until just above the knee.



Note: If your ITB is tight, this may be uncomfortable to perform. As your ITB becomes looser the exercise will become less uncomfortable. To increase pressure at this point, extend your supporting leg.



TFL Roll - Lay on your side so that the roller is placed just above the hip joint (NOT on the hip joint). The tensor fasciae latae (TFL) is a muscle that runs from the hip to the top of the pelvis. You will not have to roll much with this exercise, as it is a small muscle. If you set the roller just above the bony part of the hip and below the pelvis you should be in the location of the TFL.



Quad Roll - Lay face down on your elbows with the roller under your quadriceps (the front of your upper leg). Roll from the bottom of your pelvis to above your knee. (NOT over your knee!)



Calf Roll - Support your weight with your hands on the floor and one calf on the roller. Do not sit on the floor. Using your upper body roll from your heel to the top of your calf. both knees bent and legs up so that your thighs are at 90 degrees to your body. Slowly lower one leg towards the floor. Without touching the floor, lift the leg back to the starting position and alternate legs. Maintain the neutral spine position throughout the entire exercise.