Self-Recovery Technique

I am going to keep with the recovery theme for another month because I have another technique to share. If you are experiencing physical pain and/or muscle tension or tightness, this can cause undue stress in your life. If the pain or tension in the physical body is reduced or alleviated, the amount of overall stress being experienced can be reduced or released as well.

The technique is called Self Myofascial Release (SMR) using a foam roller, tennis or lacrosse ball, or any other tool out there on the market. SMR is also referred to as self-massage to relieve tight muscles and/or to release trigger points by applying pressure using your own body weight.

Myofascia

“The myofascia is made up of several components including the superficial fascia, which is a soft connective tissue located just below the skin that wraps and connects the muscles, bones, nerves and blood vessels of the body. Together, muscle and fascia make up what is called the myofascia system.” (www.healthstatus.com) When fascia is healthy, it is flexible, relaxed and is wavy in its appearance.

Fascia can become tight, restricted, ropey in appearance and a nuisance to the rest of the body when trauma has been experienced such as a car accident, a fall, surgery, etc. Other reasons are due to poor posture, sitting for long periods, or repetitive stress injuries.

Trigger points are also referred to as “knots” that form in the muscles. Trigger points often refer pain to another area of the body when pressure is applied directly to the specific knot. A common trigger point is the iliotibial (IT) band. When rolling on it, the pain can be felt towards the hip or all the way down to the ankle. Knots can develop in the muscle from injuries, overuse, lack of sleep, inflexibility, dehydration, compromised postures and other lifestyle factors. Some knots go unnoticed because our bodies learn to compensate. However, our body can exceed the ability to recover when we have pushed too far or not given our bodies the proper rest and recovery they deserve. Any restrictions in the fascia and muscles can likely cause pain and affect our flexibility, stability, and movement during exercise and daily activities.

How to Perform SMR

SMR allows the user to apply an appropriate amount of pressure on the soft tissue while applying traction to the fascia. This technique helps assist fascia/muscle to soften and lengthen, returning it to normal function by resuming normal blood flow, pain-free
How to Perform SMR Continued...

movement, and ultimately, enhanced performance! I will not lie, rolling can cause some discomfort especially if an area of the body is “knotted”. But remember, deep compression assists in the breakdown of scar tissue and adhesions between the skin, muscles and bones. Think of rolling like melting through the muscle and fascia. Visualize “melting” away the tightness.

It is important to note that constantly rolling on the painful area can cause more inflammation and tension, further tensing the muscle and fascia. If it is too painful to apply direct pressure, apply pressure on the surrounding area to work out any soreness or tightness in the muscle. Issues are often a result of tightness in the surrounding muscles groups. There are so many foam rollers on the market that have a variety of density to them. Some are softer than others and if you are very sensitive, I recommend using a less dense foam roller or start with a soft tennis ball.

When and How To Do SMR

I use the foam roller or a lacrosse ball before my workouts to pre-stretch the muscles and warm up the tendons and ligaments (NOTE: never roll over a joint). I concentrate on the parts of the body I will be using mostly during my workout and if I am particularly tight in other areas, I will roll there too. It is advised to roll SLOWLY, no faster than one inch per second. If areas are very tight, pause for a few seconds (5 to 10) and try to relax as much as possible. Breathe through-out the entire rolling process. Two to four passes over a muscle is all that is needed. Any more can increase the risk of irritating the area causing bruising and more inflammation especially if you are new to foam rolling. I usually take 5 to 8 minutes to foam roll before my workout. The objective here is to warm-up the muscles, not relax them.

Foam rolling can also be done after a workout if you have time. Again, the focus should be on the muscles that were used during the workout and any other areas of the body that may be calling for extra attention. This is the time to focus on relaxing the muscle(s). Rolling a few minutes and then stretching the muscle is a great way to prevent injury and to optimize tissue health. Foam rolling is work and I guarantee you will break a sweat! Focusing on form is important even when you roll. If you are too tired from your workout, find another time to roll so you do not worsen existing injuries, form flaws or muscle weaknesses.

At night, I dedicate much more time to foam rolling. I will target my entire body. Because I have more time in the evenings, I will move slowly and rest between body parts. I often contort my body in positions just to massage a trigger point I have found (refer to my YouTube video). Foam rolling before bedtime often helps me sleep very well because my muscles are so relaxed.

SMR can be done every day, a couple of times a day, as long as you are mindful about your approach. If you are new to foam rolling and become very sore after, take at least 24 hours in between foam rolling sessions. Drink plenty of water and get enough sleep.

“Rest and self-care are so important. When you take time to replenish your spirit, it allows you to serve others from the overflow. You cannot serve from an empty vessel.”
~ Eleanor Brownn
Final Thoughts and YouTube Video

In a perfect world, our bodies would be healthy, strong and symmetrical allowing us to perform at Olympic standards. But what fun would that be? Because we are beautifully imperfect, our bodies need more attention and love in ways that heal and nurture. If your goal is to function optimally in your 90’s, it would be in your best interest to experiment with this technique and others to keep your muscles and tissues healthy.

I created a YouTube video to help you get started on foam rolling. I also show how to use a lacrosse and medicine ball to self-massage and target any trigger points you may have. Click the link to view and follow along.

Refreshing Beverage

I LOVE this time of the year! Fresh veggies, fruits and herbs everywhere. Do you ever crave something cool, refreshing and sweet? I have an easy beverage recipe for you to try. I have been making this refreshing drink almost every evening for the past week.

Watermelon Basil Juice

Ingredients (I don’t usually measure)
Seedless watermelon
4 – 6 basil leaves
Juice from 1 fresh lemon or 2 fresh limes (or more depending on taste)

Cut watermelon flesh into 1 or 2 inch pieces and add to the blender (I use a Vitamix). Add the basil leaves and blend till watermelon is pulverized (1 minute at most). Juice a lemon or limes and add to the blender. Blend for a few more seconds. Refrigerate for an hour or pour into glasses, over ice. Sit back in your lawn chair with a good book and a glass of this refreshing juice – smile and enjoy 😊