

Roll Away the Tension

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It would be great to offer all your gymnasts a massage before and after practice, but that would be impractical and costly. The biofoam roller is a great way to provide your athletes with self massage / tissue tension relief. This article will discuss the use and benefits of the biofoam roller for that purpose.

The biofoam roller is a lightweight cylindrical foam “tube” designed to help with decreasing tissue tension and improving flexibility. It can also be used for balance and strength training exercise. The benefits of using the roller are: ease of use, self directed, cheap, decreases tissue tension, increases blood flow, prepares muscles for activity and enhances recovery afterwards.

Using the foam roller prior to exercise or practice is a great way to warm up and prepare the muscles for the work that lies ahead. Often times, due to stress and physical activity, muscles “hold” tension and develop “knots” with in the muscle fibers. These “knots” and the build up of tension can interfere with the muscles ability to fire properly. Ultimately, this can contribute to decreased performance and increased risk of injury. A good analogy is to think of in using the foam roller is a wrinkled shirt. If you pull or stretch the shirt the wrinkles may disappear but return as soon as you release the stretch. On the other hand, if you apply pressure and heat (ironing) the wrinkles are eliminated. So, think of it as “ironing” the muscles. There are basically two ways to apply their use. Simply roll back and forth over a muscle for a desired number of reps or time. Or, you can slowly roll over the muscle and when you hit a tender spot hold the pressure on that spot until it dissipates working your way along the muscle. Initially some of the muscles will be noticeably “uncomfortable”, but as you continue to use the biofoam roller and release the tension and knots it will become more comfortable. You will notice that certain muscles will always seem to be more tender. Those muscles may be subjected to more stress due to muscle imbalances and or compensations. After the workout, the biofoam roller will help to dissipate tissue tension from the workout and enhance blood flow to promote recovery. Proper hydration and nutrition further enhance the training and recovery effect. Presented are a few examples of the major areas to target.

Position self on roller for specific muscle. Slowly roll up and down muscle without going over the knee joint for given number of reps or time. 1-2 sets of 15 reps works well and should be completed in just a few minutes. I like to do the foam roll first followed by an active warm-up and then proceed into practice. Due to several research studies that have shown static stretching to be detrimental to strength and power I prefer to static stretch after practice. Here is a tip, buy the 3 ft rollers and cut them in half to double your supply. This length is more than enough and actually works well w/ the smaller athlete. So, enjoy and “just roll with it”.



Hamstring



IT Band (lat thigh)



Quadriceps



Piriformis / Buttock



Thoracic / Lumbar



Cervical /Thoracic/Lumbar



Post Shld / Lats

Other areas to work, not pictured, include the calves, inner thigh, lateral low leg and rolling foot over tennis ball.

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