

Loosen Up to Run Strong: Foam Rolling for Flexibility

When beginning a new regiment of physical activity, many individuals include cardiovascular training, muscular strength training, and muscular endurance training into their schedule. Flexibility, however, is an often-neglected but equally important aspect of training that is necessary for continued success. In order to maintain an injury-free training experience, it is important to include flexibility training as a regular element in a training schedule.

The most popular method of flexibility training includes a stretching regiment before or after bouts of physical activity. However, while lengthening the muscle fibers does prove to have some benefit, a more effective flexibility technique, self-myofascial release, serves to work out the tightness within a muscle that cannot be addressed by passive stretching. This technique requires the use of a foam roller or massage stick to work out the knots in a muscle that occur from repeated use and tightening. Similar to the concept of massage therapy, self-myofascial release by foam rolling allows the trainee to apply pressure to any area of muscle that is particularly knotted or tense and use that pressure to knead out any developing tension and subsequently loosen the muscle. A loose muscle is a happy muscle, meaning that this looseness will allow the muscle to perform to its potential and adequately support the body through bouts of physical activity.

What exactly happens when a muscle's knots are left to tense and tighten? The body is a kinetic chain, so when one piece is not performing optimally, another part is forced to compensate. Take, for example, a distance runner. Many runners have excessively tight hip flexors because continued hip flexion causes the muscles in the quads to tighten repetitively throughout the run. These muscles attach within the pelvis, and when they become tight they can pull on the pelvic bones, causing an imbalance called an anterior pelvic tilt. This means the pelvis is constantly tilted forward, which lengthens the muscles of the hamstrings and shortens the muscles of the lower back. This new and improper alignment can cause the hamstrings can become weak and the lower back to become tight and painful, placing unnecessary stressors along the body during physical activity and rest. However, if the muscles in the quadriceps were loose and knot-free, the pelvic position would remain neutral and no alignment problems would surface. Alignment issues are often the cause of compensation-related injuries, and can easily be resolved by addressing excessive muscular tension with a foam roller or other self-myofascial release tool.

Foam rollers can be utilized on any part of the body that proves troublesome as training progresses, because excessive tension in one area will lead to strain on another. The staff at Fleet Feet Sports Louisville is happy to provide an educational session to address any developing issues. For more information, please contact us at (502) 479-8786 or e-mail staff@fleetfeetsportslouisville.com for more information!

Erin Sheehy
Training Groups Coordinator
Fleet Feet Sports Louisville