



THE REHAB ROOM

Don't Fear the Foam!

Myofascial release and trigger point therapy are 2 terms that every endurance athlete will need to understand at some point in their athletic pursuits. In essence, these are soft tissue self massage techniques that can be used to manage tight spots in muscles, help aid in recovery and return the tissues back to their normal mobility and flexibility. Fascia is a thick, dense fibrous connective tissue that blends between and connects the muscles (think the white tough stuff on the outside of a leg of lamb). A trigger point is a tight band within a muscle or a “knot” in basic terms. When the fascia is tight or an active trigger point exists they have the capacity to “refer” pain along the arm or leg depending on where they lie. This explains why sometimes you press somewhere tight on your body and it sends an ache to another part.

Trigger points and tight muscles form due to a variety of reasons. They are usually due to large amounts of training with an underlying biomechanical fault or weakness in one area and therefore another area will compensate by being somewhat overloaded and “tightening” up. Posture, hydration, lack of rest and recovery, stress and other lifestyle factors can also contribute. Myofascial release can help to reverse these changes in the muscle by helping to restore normal blood flow and flexibility to the tissue.

The foam roller and a spikey ball or baseball etc, are tools that all triathletes should own or at least have access to. A hollow bumpy surfaced roller has been suggested to apply higher contact pressures in a more localised contact area than the traditional non hollow foam roller. Rollers are generally better for addressing the fascial tightness by rolling over it whereas a spikey ball etc is better for the more isolated trigger points by statically applying pressure onto it. An added benefit of the roller is that they can be used for core stability also but this is a different topic in itself!

Common areas that need addressing are the ITB, calves, hamstrings, shins and gluts in runners or cyclists; and the thoracic spine, pecs, posterior rotator cuff and upper trapezius in swimmers. Some examples are in the pictures below.

Generally speaking a foam roller or trigger ball should be used 3 times per week (not back to back days) after a training session depending on how tight you are – a balance is needed. About 20 rolls (up and down is 1) or 2-3 mins on a tight muscle is about right. You may need breaks or need to adapt the pressure with this depending on your tolerance. It will be uncomfortable at the time yet should not be unbearable and should feel better afterwards. If you have a specific area of tightness or a current injury or potential injury risk, then these techniques can also be used prior to a session as they are thought to improve flexibility without impeding performance like static stretching can. Myofascial release techniques can also be more specific than stretching by targeting the tight areas within the muscles that need addressing.

If the muscle feels bruised or you are creating pain beyond the session, you need to reduce the intensity and restart again a few days later once it has settled. Techniques should be demonstrated by a sports physiotherapist or qualified conditioning coach.

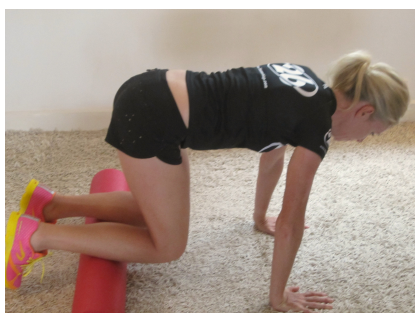
Happy racing!



Calves



IT Band



Shins

David Garrick is an Australian trained titled Sports Physiotherapist working at Physio Central. He has a special interest in lower limb and overuse sporting injuries particularly in runners, triathletes, football codes and skiers.

For further information email on david@physio-central.com or go to www.physio-central.com