

How-To-Do Self-Myofascial Release (SMR)

User's Guide to Get Rid of Aches and Pains to Improve Everyday Performance

General Guidelines:

- For optimal reduction of aches and pains, **consistency is the key**. Daily use will support a relaxed, flexible and strong muscular system ready on demand without discomfort or limitations.
- SMR can be used before or after exercise, and several times a day if desired.
- When doing SMR, go *SLOW* as you target sensitive areas for tension release.
- To relax your body while working on a particular area, use slow gentle breathing. Any tension in the tissue being targeted (due to holding one's breath) will prevent the roller from penetrating into the deeper layers of soft tissue. This limits SMR from working.
- The ideal way to do SMR is to PAUSE the rolling action over sensitive/painful areas until a "release" is felt in the area or the pain subsides and the tissue softens (roughly 30-90 seconds). The activation of a release takes time and may require tolerating some initial discomfort. This is particularly true for sensitive or overly tight areas.
- To increase or decrease pressure on targeted area, you can use your body weight. For example, if you foam roll your calves, you can cross the free leg over the targeted leg to increase pressure (see image on page 2) or keep the legs uncrossed to decrease pressure.
- *Contraindications of use without physician approval include:* malignancy, osteoporosis, osteomyelitis, phlebitis, cellulitis, acute rheumatoid arthritis, blood clot, aneurysm, anticoagulant therapy, bursitis, sutures, congestive heart failure, bleeding disorders, goiter, eczema and other skin lesions, hypersensitive skin conditions, open wounds, healing fractures, obstructive edema, advanced diabetes, hematoma or systemic or localized infection, febrile state, or advanced degenerative changes, organ failure (liver, pancreas, kidney).

Discover Your SMR Techniques to Get Rid of Aches and Pains!

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Where to Begin:

Start where you feel aches or pains. This guide is arranged from the ground up, meaning lower legs are the first body parts to consider. Scroll through the document to see which techniques may be best for your body.

Review the “Good for” and “Recommended for” sections for each body part to get an idea of which techniques are best for your condition. For full body rejuvenation, use this guide and techniques in the order presented.

Calves (Lower Legs)

When tension arises in these muscles, heel pain and eventually hip and back pain may arise. A foam roll is the recommended tool to address this concern.

Good for: Releasing tightness in the lower legs, preventing the onset of heel pain or relieving heel pain.

Recommended for: People who wear heels, have flexibility concerns (struggle to touch their toes), get shin splints, or worry about back and heel pain.

How to do SMR with the Calves: Sit with the back of your calves on top of the foam roller and both hands on the floor behind you. Keep your leg muscles relaxed, and let your heels lightly drag the floor.

Roll from just above your ankles to just below your knees. Cross your legs at the ankle to increase the exercise’s intensity.

For even greater activation, try to place one calf on top of the roller, and rock your leg left and right to allow the roller to apply more pressure into the muscle.



Peroneals (Outside of Lower Legs)

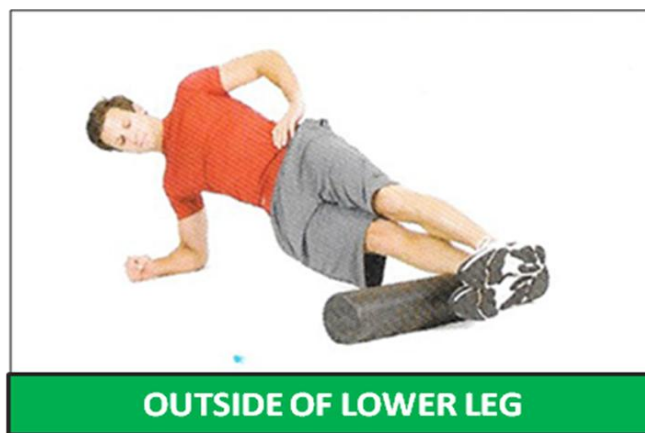
These lower leg muscles are used extensively to support the body when standing, walking, hiking, running or especially sports with excessive jumping. If they are tight, people might feel aches and pains in their shins or heels. A foam roll is the recommended tool to address this concern.

Good for: Preventing overuse injuries of the lower leg, such as shin splints.

Recommended for: People who wear heels, struggle to touch their toes, experience knee, back or hip pain, or shin splints. This is an exercise for anyone who experiences lower leg aches & pains.

How to do SMR with the Peroneals: Position your hands and knees on the floor, with the broad side of a foam roller placed underneath your shins; your hands should be positioned just in front of your shoulders on the ground, and your heels rotated slightly outward.

Roll by shifting your weight forward, bringing your shoulders in front of your hands, to move the roller from your ankles to just below your knees.



Illicitibial Band or IT Band (Outside of Upper Leg)

This is a sensitive area for SMR, particularly for runners. Many of my clients really FEEL this one. But, when tension gets released here, clients feel more flexible and it eases pressure on their knees! A foam roll is the recommended tool to address this concern.

Good for: Alleviating hip or knee pain due to a tight IT band.

Recommended for: People who are concerned about knee pain or are very active running, cycling or exercising.

How to do SMR with the IT Band:

Position yourself on your side, with your lower leg extended and on top of the foam roller and your upper leg bent with your foot firmly on the floor.

Support your upper body on one elbow and forearm. Keep your abdominal and back muscles lightly flexed to stabilize your spine.

Roll the outside of your thigh, from just below the hip joint to just above the knee. If the movement is too uncomfortable, reduce the force against the roller by shifting more of your body weight to your foot that's on the floor.



Piriformis (Glutes)

Another “sensitive” area that may be related to discomfort in the lower back, glutes, or numbness down the legs. After SMR with a foam roll, the glutes and hips feel better.

Good for: Releasing tightness in the hips - glutes (buttocks) region, supporting flexibility and decreasing risk for sciatica symptoms, if not related to a herniated disk.

Recommended for: People, who spend a lot of time seated, or who struggle with hip stiffness or experience sciatica-like symptoms.

How to do SMR with the Piriformis: Sit on the center of the foam roller like a camp fire log. Then, cross one ankle over the opposite knee. Place one or both hands on the floor behind you to support your upper body.

Then, slowly rock back and forth on the glute of your bent leg. Then switch leg positions to roll the opposite side.



Adductors (Inner Thigh)

Groin tightness can be very limiting and painful. SMR with a foam roll can make a big difference moving around on your feet. This SMR technique is a bit challenging.

Good for: Having optimal mobility in your groin, which helps increase the range of motion in your hips. This reduces your risk of straining these muscles or losing your balance. SMR here makes it easier to move, walk or run.

Recommended for: People concerned with balance or struggling with groin tightness, and for folks who like to be active yet feel limited in hip movement.

How to do SMR with the Adductors:

Position yourself face-down, with legs partially spread. Support yourself on your elbows and forearms, and keep your abdominal and back muscles lightly flexed to stabilize your spine. Rest one knee on the floor and the groin area of the other leg against the top of the foam roller.

Move the roller back and forth along the length of your adductors by slowly moving your hips to the left and right. Then, switch to the other leg.



Hamstrings (Back of Upper Legs)

These muscles are some of the biggest muscles in the body and affect all movements in a standing position, especially climbing stairs. Tight hamstrings are common among people with lower back pain. Since this area is not as sensitive, a high density foam roll is recommended.

Good for: Releasing tight hamstrings, improving flexibility, bending over and overall movement.

Recommended for: People with back health concerns; especially recommended for athletes who need speed like sprinters, basketball, soccer, football, and lacrosse players; also great for cyclists, track lovers and weight lifters.

How to do SMR with the Hamstrings:

Sit with the back of your thighs on top of the roller and both hands on the floor behind you. Keep your leg muscles relaxed, and let your heels lightly drag the floor.

Roll your hamstrings from just above your knees to just below your pelvis. To increase intensity, shift your weight to one leg by crossing your legs at the ankle.



Quadriceps/Hip Flexors (Front of Upper Legs)

In modern society, which features lots of sitting, the quads and hip flexors are one of the most common areas for muscle tightness. If you release tension in this area with a foam roll, you can alleviate some tension on the front upper legs, which positively impacts the low back, particularly when moving from a seated position to standing upright.

Good for: Releasing tightness, improving flexibility and the ability to get up and down out of a chair.

Recommended for: People who sit a lot (travel, desk job, etc.), struggle with hip or back pain, enjoy running, biking, walking and hiking.

How to do SMR with the Quads/Hip Flexors: Position yourself face-down with both thighs resting on top of the foam roller. Support yourself on your elbows and forearms, and keep your abdominal and back muscles lightly flexed to stabilize your spine.

Roll slowly back and forth on the foam roller, from just above your knees to just below your hips, and pause at any spot that feels especially tender. Your quadriceps (front thigh) muscles should stay relaxed throughout the movement, and your toes should drag the floor.

Because the quads are such a large muscle group, you may want to spend extra time on this exercise. Repeat the back and forth movements until all tenderness dissipates or as much as you can tolerate at a time.

To dig deeper into the muscle and increase the intensity of this exercise, tilt your body to the left or right while rolling to add more pressure with your body weight.



Upper Back (Trapezius)/Neck

These areas get tight with both physical and emotional stress. The Thera Cane is a top SMR option here. It's designed to provide you with a better mechanical advantage to apply pressure comfortably. With a Thera Cane, you can control the amount of force you put on the soft tissue. The Thera Cane is typically held on the localized region that needs to be addressed until discomfort subsides, such as shown in the picture below. Increased pressure with the Thera Cane will penetrate deep into the soft tissue whereas light pressure will affect more superficial structures.

Good for: Releasing tension in the upper back (trapezius) muscles and neck area.

Recommended for: People who have to work at a computer or drive a lot with their hands at the ten and two position (clock) on the steering wheel. Also for people who struggle with neck and shoulder tension.

How to do SMR with the Upper Back (Trapezius) / Neck:

Begin standing or seated. Then, holding the Thera Cane with two hands, position the rounded end of the Thera Cane on the tight muscles. Gently move the Thera Cane around to find tender areas in the upper back or neck.

If you find a tender area, try to apply gentle pressure and hold it there as long as you can tolerate. This area is sensitive so go easy as you penetrate the tissues.

Continue to work with the Thera Cane to release the tension as much as possible. Don't force it. A little at a time is advised as some knots may take several days to "release".



Middle/Upper Back (Thoracic Spine)

This region is often tight when people “hold their stress” in their upper backs, have to work at a desktop computer or drive for prolonged periods of time. Here, a foam roll is recommended for SMR.

Good for: Releasing the upper back and neck tension.

Recommended for: People who hold tension and stress in their upper back/neck region, work at a desktop or drive for long periods of time, or have to use a Smartphone regularly.

How to do SMR with the Thoracic Spine/Upper Back: Position yourself face-up, with your upper back on the foam roller, both knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Keep your abdominal muscles flexed to support your upper body and stabilize your spine.

Roll slowly from the lower edge of your trapezius muscles (lower-thoracic area) to the top of the rhomboids (upper thoracic area). DO NOT roll onto your neck.

To increase the intensity of this exercise, cross your arms in front of you or try rocking to the right and left as you roll.



Latissimus Dorsi (Under and Around the Armpit)

The first time most clients try to use SMR on this area with a foam roll, it feels awkward. But, after getting used to it, they find it loosens up tension in their back and shoulders, which helps them move their arms over head with more ease and comfort.

Good for: Releasing tension in the shoulders and back.

Recommended for: People who have to work at a computer or drive a lot, struggle to lift their arms overhead, experience back pain or tightness, or use their arms a lot for work and play, such as painters, ball players or musicians.

How to do SMR with the Latissimus Dorsi:

Lie on your side on the floor, with your arm outstretched and over the top of the foam roller. Position the roller in the auxiliary area (armpit) pressed against the latissimus muscle.

Gently rock and roll in all directions. If you find a tender area, try to hold it there as long as you can tolerate. The range of the rolling motion for this exercise is small, therefore rocking from side to side and rotating the body a bit allows for deeper penetration of the muscle.



Lower Back

Lower back pain rears its head in about 80% of the adult population. The Thera Cane is a nice option to alleviate it. The Thera Cane is designed to provide you with a better mechanical advantage to apply pressure comfortably. With a Thera Cane, you can control the amount of force you put on the soft tissue. The Thera Cane is typically held on the localized region that needs to be addressed until discomfort subsides, such as shown in the picture below. Increased pressure with the Thera Cane will penetrate deep into the soft tissue whereas light pressure will affect more superficial structures.

Good for: Releasing tension in the lower back.

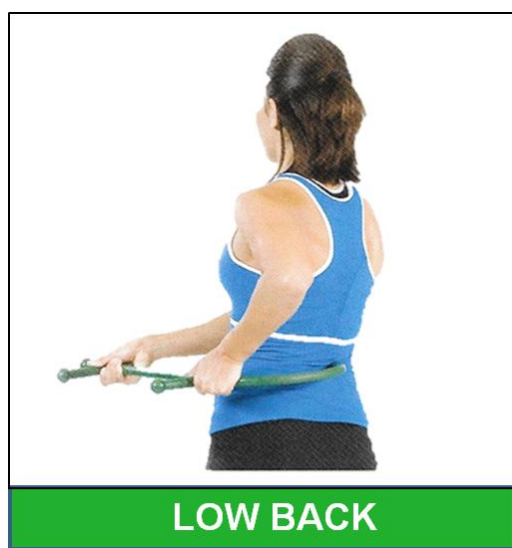
Recommended for: People who have to sit a lot, work at a computer or drive often. Also recommended for people who tend to experience lower back tightness.

How to do SMR with the Lower Back:

Standing upright, hold the Thera Cane with two hands, position the rounded end of the Thera Cane on the tight muscles of the low back. Gently move the Thera Cane around to find tender areas.

If you find a tender area, try to apply gentle pressure and hold it there as long as you can tolerate. This area usually can tolerate a lot of pressure, so do your best to penetrate the tissues.

Continue to work with the Thera Cane to release the tension as much as possible. Don't force it. A little each day is advised as some deeper knots may take several days to "release".



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