

GETTING THE MOST FROM THE FOAM ROLL

A piece of equipment that was previously found only in physio offices has found its way into normal use. Our resident movement expert, **Charlene Hutsebaut**, explains the roll's benefits, and demonstrates some of her favourite moves.

Being a personal trainer who is constantly on the go around London, I am a big fan of small equipment. Certain pieces are easy to transport or store, effective to use and lend new elements to old-style workouts, bringing modern challenges and stimulation. Many of the gadgets are economical investments, and can easily be taken to the office, on a work trip, stored at home or used for holiday sessions. This will be the first in a series of small equipment features meant to help you bring a new diversity to your routines. Our first focus will be the foam roll. The roll, like the therapy ball, has in recent years finally come out of physiotherapy clinics and into the mainstream: it is light to carry and store, although tough to pack in a suitcase!

A roll can aid you with three areas of your health and fitness: self-massage, core movements and stretching. Rolls give an overall massage effect as you move back and forth over

a chosen muscle group, while also promoting core muscle engagement for support in the position. A study in the *Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* by a group at Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Canada, states that foam rolling post-workout can ease muscle soreness. Core movements in my definition include a tool box of exercises for the abdominal group, back muscles and any others that move or stabilise the pelvis, rib cage and shoulder girdle. Working this overall unit of the torso should result in flatter abs, a stronger back and improved posture. A roll additionally enables us to do some excellent stretches, because it facilitates positions up off the floor.

On all of the moves below, be sure to engage your core muscles (abs and back) on setup and during the massages and exercises, for a strong, safe, wrapped position of the torso. Here are some of my favourites:

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THE MESSAGES

As with any massage or stretch, the following should be intense but not painful.

1 TENSOR FASCIA LATAE (TFL)

This is popular with runners because they can have problems either with the TFL or the iliotibial band (ITB). Many experts state that addressing the TFL and other hip muscles is a more effective way of combatting ITB tightness and pain.

Setup

Lying on your side, on the bottom forearm (at a right angle to your body), with the roll sitting underneath the top end of the side of your pelvis.

Movement

Roll down the side of the pelvis to the upper thigh, then move back up to the top of the pelvis. Repeat for up to two minutes.

Top tips

This one can be extremely painful, so be sure to ease off to the amount of pressure that you can handle.



SETUP

MOVEMENT



2 BACK

This move tends to be more comfortable if used for the upper and mid back rather than lower.

Setup

Lying on your back with the roll under your shoulder blades, feet on floor, knees bent and hips off the mat.

Movement

Move the roll down your back to the middle portion, or a bit lower if comfortable, by hinging at your knees to produce the movement. Repeat for up to two minutes.

Top tips

This is a great position for gluteal (bum) engagement. Squeeze the gluts to hold yourself up in the bridge as you roll back and forth.



THE EXERCISES

1 TOE TAPS

Setup

Lying on your back, feet on floor, knees bent. Pull hips up into a bridge and ease your pelvis onto the roll so that you are on your top bony portion for support. Bring both feet off the floor with knees above hips, right angles behind knees. Before moving, be sure to engage ab and back muscles for a set position, and throughout the moves, re-evaluate to check if you are still holding these contractions.

Movement

Breathe in to prepare.
Breathe out to move one leg from the hip to tap the toe to the mat.
Breathe in to move leg back to start.
Repeat other leg.

Top tips

This is an asymmetrical move, so keep the pelvis and rib cage even and still, with no dropping to either side. This will ensure great work through the core unit.

2 BACK EXTENSIONS

Setup

Lying on stomach, wrists on roll, feet hip width apart, looking down at the mat.

Movement

Breathe in to prepare.

Breathe out as you lift shoulders and chest off the mat, drawing the roll towards you onto the hands and pulling shoulders away from ears; look at the roll for best head/neck alignment.

Breathe in to start setup position.

Top tips

As you come off the mat, contract the abdominal wall for extra core engagement.



THE STRETCH

1 PIRIFORMIS TWIST

Setup

Sitting with bent staggered legs, foam roll on knee side, turn torso to face roll.

Movement

Breathe in to prepare.

Breathe out to take chest towards the floor, moving roll away from you. Keep pelvis on the floor.

Breathe in to return to setup.

Top tips

In set-up position, think about tall, stacked, good posture alignment.



MOVEMENT



SETUP

3 BRIDGE - FOOT SHIFTS

Setup

Lying on the back with knees bent, feet on the roll, arms on the mat by your sides, hips in bridge off the floor.

Movement

Shift roll back and forth between the heels and balls of feet.

Top tips

Keep hips up by engaging gluts.

Squeeze pelvic floor muscles for added core engagement.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charlene Hutsebaut, B.P.E. B.Ed. CSCS, trained in massage while in the Athletic Therapy programme at the University of Manitoba with her mentor Glen Bergeron, chief therapist to the Canadian Olympic team. She is a personal trainer, corporate speaker, writer and brand ambassador with over 15 000 client hours and 22 years of experience in the fitness industry. Charlene speaks regularly on health and wellness in corporate settings, along with running her PT consultancy at the exclusive St. Pancras Hotel in London.