

# Recovering Your Body

Relieve those aches. Get on a roll! *by Thom Forbes*

**Do you like robust massages that leave your limbs feeling fluid and tingling?** If you do, you'll love foam rolling, which works out those kinks, knots and aches in your muscles and joints with just a few minutes of practice a day. All it takes to get started is an investment of less than \$30 for a roller and time to watch some short tutorials that are found easily online.

Technically, the process is called self-myofascial release (SMR). Fasciae are the connective tissue layers that surround our muscles, bones and joints. You know that thin layer you see between the skin and meat of a chicken breast? That's fascia.

Muscle groups such as the iliotibial band (running from the hip to the knee along the side of the thigh), the soleus and gastrocnemius (calf) and piriformis (where you feel that literal pain in the butt) tend to get tight and sore because of too much stress or too little action. Then there are the body parts that yap at many of us due to our harried but sedentary lifestyles: the neck and upper or lower back.

Using rollers—cylinders of varying densities that are usually 1 to 3 feet long and 6 inches in diameter—you glide over the affected areas, lengthening the tissue. You'll probably hear some gratifying snaps, crackles and pops as you do, but, inevitably, you'll hit a particularly tender spot. Don't shy away; that's a trigger point. Stay right there for 20 to 30 seconds. The knot will lengthen, and the pain will recede.

You can roll daily as a self-contained program to increase flexibility and range of motion and/or as a warm-up or cool down to your regular exercise routines. Mary Pritchett, a personal trainer and co-founder of Malibu Fitness in Malibu, Calif., primarily uses SMR as a tool to loosen up muscle tissue during the cool down following intensive cardio workouts such as spinning. Pilates instructors in her facility, on the other hand, take their classes through rolling routines before they exercise. It's also helpful before resistance training.

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The rollers can also be used for strength and balance exercises. Pritchett has people lie down lengthwise along their spines and do chest flies with weights or improve their balance by lifting a foot and the opposite hand off the floor at the same time. “There are truly dozens and dozens of exercises that can be done,” Pritchett says. “The only thing holding you back is either your body or your imagination.”

Our bodies—due to age, injury or genetics—do tend to hold us back, and some people find traditional rolling too painful to practice regularly.

“It's like ironing yourself out like a wrinkled shirt where you go over an area of tenderness until you can't stand it anymore,” says somatic-movement educator and manual therapist Sue Hitzmann, who is based in New York City. The MELT Method she has developed is all about “quieting the stress reflex in the nervous system.”

Hitzmann uses two custom rollers that both are softer than the white or extra-firm black ones found in most gyms. Clients, particularly older ones, find them easier to use, and she says that the effect of gentle rolling, targeted to specific areas, lasts longer than the temporary relief felt in traditional rolling.

“We're finding that if you push too deep too fast, the connective tissue repels, and you actually get the opposite effect of what you're looking for long-term,” Hitzmann says. Bottom line: “To inflict more pain to get out of pain is counterproductive.”

Hitzmann's four-step process of reconnecting, rebalancing, releasing and rehydrating can be a rejuvenating and rewarding part of nearly every day. ■



*Thom Forbes is the digital editorial director for RenewEveryDay.com. He's posted some tutorial videos on how to roll on Renew's YouTube channel at [youtube.com/renewvideochannel](https://youtube.com/renewvideochannel), or go to [meltmethod.com](https://meltmethod.com) or [performbetter.com](https://performbetter.com).*