



## **Relentless Strength Training Guide to Soft-Tissue Release**

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## The Basics of Myofascial Release

One of the primary limiting factors to movement is neuromuscular tone, muscular impingements, scar tissue, adhesions, and general tightness. If you can't move it doesn't matter how fit you are cardiovascularly or how strong you are, you simply aren't going to be athletic. In this guide we're going to cover how we're going to improve the quality of your muscle tissue, ensure that you have full, free range of motion in your joints, and promote rapid healing, recovery, and growth from training. I'd even go so far as to say that this is the stuff that will be your "secret weapon" when it comes to going from Average Joe to Action Hero.

Basically what you're going to be doing is performing a massage program on yourself to work out the knots in your muscles and fascia, which is the thin, silvery membrane of tissue that binds your muscles. As a result of daily activities, training, injuries, and repetitive movements your muscles can develop knots, or trigger points, where they don't relax as they should and the fascia can get bound up.

If your muscles are full of these trigger points and adhesions then they won't slide along each other as they should. They also won't relax or contract as well as they're supposed to. This can greatly limit your flexibility, be very painful, and reduce the strength or function of your muscles.

The truth is that the vast majority of us have some sort of myofascial dysfunction. Some have just a few things that can be worked on, while others of us are totally jacked up.

## Tools for Self-Myofascial Release

**The Foam Roller:** When people do start learning about self-myofascial release they usually start with a foam roller. These are round tubes of dense foam, usually 6" in diameter. You can place them on the floor and then roll your body along them at various points to create a releasing massage. They're cheap, effective, and generally pretty easy to use. I recommend that all of my clients get a foam roller. As a con, they can be a bit on the bulky side, so they're inconvenient to travel with.

I usually suggest that anyone over about 150 lbs invest in a high-density foam roller. They're usually black as opposed to a normal foam roller which is either white or red. They're still cheap at about \$20 and will last a lot longer than normal rollers. Bigger athletes have a tendency to squash the normal white ones down pretty quickly. I got only the high-density ones for Relentless when I opened five years ago and after pretty much daily use they're just as good as the first day.

**Tennis/Lacrosse/Soft Balls:** Sometimes it's hard or pretty much impossible to get into certain spots with the foam roller. Other times you just need a bit more pressure on a particularly tough trigger point. That's when it's useful to bring in a small ball to roll on. The ball will enable you to get into small areas like the bottoms of your feet, around your traps and shoulder blades, and anything on your arms that a foam roller is just really inconvenient for.

Most people start out with a raquetball or a tennis ball. These are a good size and they're pretty soft, so discomfort is minimal. Once you progress to the point where you need a firmer touch you can start using a harder lacrosse ball, baseball, or softball. Also, the little superballs that kids play with (you know, the ones that bounce really high) are great for getting into small areas like the bottoms of your feet.

**Massage Tools (TheraCane/The Stick):** There are a variety of massage tools out there that work pretty well for self-myofascial release. Two that you'll encounter most often are a TheraCane and The Stick. Neither are necessary for our program, but they're both good products.

The TheraCane allows you to reach some spots that can be tough to get to, even with a small ball against the wall. It also allows you much finer control over your location and pressure than using a ball.

The Stick is sort of like a hand-held foam roller. As opposed to rolling on the roller, you roll it on yourself. This makes it a bit more portable and allows you to reach some areas that you might have a tough time getting to with a bulky roller but you sacrifice some pressure as there's only so much you can do with your arms versus your bodyweight.

## How to Work on Soft Tissue

Using one of the tools listed above or your hands in the Supported Thumb position (see picture in the triceps section) work over the target area in a scanning fashion. If you feel a particularly sensitive spot or an object like a knot, pay special attention to that area and work it over a few more times. Roll or stroke an area 10-15 times. This will help break up scar tissue, free frozen trigger points, clear waste products, and bring blood to the area to help facilitate healing.

When pressing on an area don't be afraid to press hard. Often when you first find a trigger point or knot it will be particularly sensitive. Press down hard on it for a few seconds. This will help it release as well as desensitize you to the pressure which will allow you to work on it more. When you're working on a small area you want your skin to move under the object you're pressing with rather than the object moving over your skin. If you find that you are bruising or abrading your skin, then you're pressing too hard.

Speed of rolling is also important. Too many people will jump on a foam roller and just zip-zip-zip over their target area. That feels good, but it isn't really doing anything. Instead try to move at a speed of about an inch per second and really let yourself relax, breathing smoothly and deeply as you work through a body part.

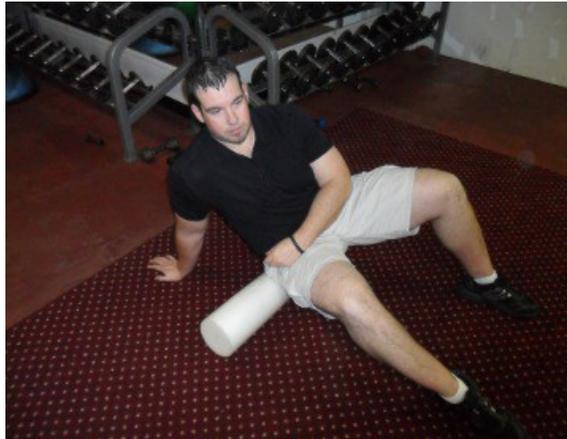
# Soft Tissue Myofascial Work by Bodypart

## Lower Body

**Glutes:** In today's society we have a tendency to sit a huge portion of the time. Most of us work sitting, we travel to and from work sitting, and we go through most of our recreation time doing sitting activities such as watching TV or spending time tooling around on a computer. When we sit our glutes and hips tighten up and become weakened. So then we decide to get in shape or take part in an athletic activity and are surprised when we pull muscles or don't play at the level we expected!

Almost everyone goes through back pain in their life because of the above-mentioned lifestyle. A major portion of that pain comes from chronically weak and tight glutes. When the glutes are tight and/or weak they either pull on the lower back, resulting in pain, or don't operate as they should and therefore cause the lower back to have to take on more than it's designed to do, which also results in pain.

To roll out the glutes start by simply sitting on the foam roller and leaning to one side (which ever side you're going to roll). Roll back and forth, feeling for knots or particularly sensitive spots. Focus your attention on these spots for 10-15 strokes.

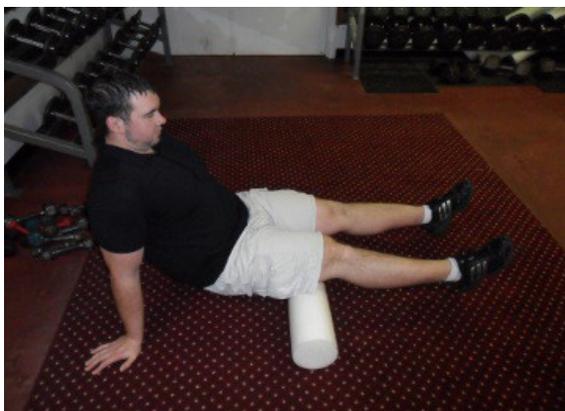


Next, pull your rolling leg's foot up over your opposing ankle, creating a "figure 4" with your legs. This will put a stretch on the glute that you're rolling and focus more pressure on it. Repeat the rolling, paying extra attention to the sensitive spots. Make sure to roll a bit on the outside of your hip, too. Usually there are a couple of trigger points there that can contribute to a lot of lower back pain.



Over time (a few months, probably) you'll find that the roller allowed you to clear up a lot of superficial knots but you can feel some deeper knots in the glutes that you can't really get to. If this is the case, move on to using a softball or lacrosse ball. Be prepared for that to be a bit tender!

**Hamstrings:** The hamstrings are pretty easy to roll. Simply sit on your butt with the roller under your hamstrings. Tighten your quads a bit and prop your upper body up so you can roll back and forth along the roller. Make sure to hit all the way from the back of your knees to your glutes! Lighter athletes may not be able to get much pressure on the hamstrings simply because their legs don't weigh enough. If you need to get more pressure then stack your legs as shown and do one leg at a time and/or use a softball or lacrosse ball instead of a roller.

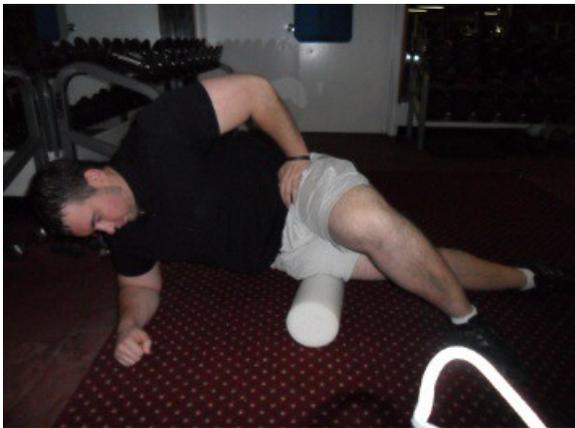


**IT Bands:** The Illiotibial Bands, or IT bands are thick bands of fibrous tissue that runs from your hips to your knees. This area can become full of knots and adhesions and cause all kinds of hip and knee problems when it's too tight. To compound matters, the IT band area is also really hard to stretch, so it's easy for it to tighten up.

Rolling on the IT band itself isn't really all that effective as it's so tough and a lot of times all you do is piss it off. Instead focus on rolling along the edges towards your thighs or your hamstrings and you'll find that loosening up that tissue will help the IT Band relax which really goes a long way toward keeping your flexibility up and helping keep your knees healthy. Be warned, it's one of the more sensitive areas to roll!

Start by laying on your side on a roller with one elbow propped underneath you as if you were going to do a side plank. Place your non-rolling foot on the ground to help balance you and take some of the load off of your leg. Roll back and forth all the way from your hip to right above your knee (it'll probably be especially tender there).

As you get more used to the pressure you can stack your feet on top of each other to bring greater pressure onto your IT bands. Remember, stick a little bit to the front near the thigh or a little to the back near the hamstring.



**Adductors:** The adductors are often tight and are pretty easy to roll out, although you might look a little funny if you do it in the gym.

Arrange the foam roller parallel to your body and place it under the leg that you're going to roll. Bend that leg at 90 degrees and roll the roller back and forth along the inside of your thigh. I've always found it easier to keep my hand (the rolling side) on the top of the foam roller to direct it.

Also keep your opposing foot faced away from your body. This will provide just a little extra stretch.

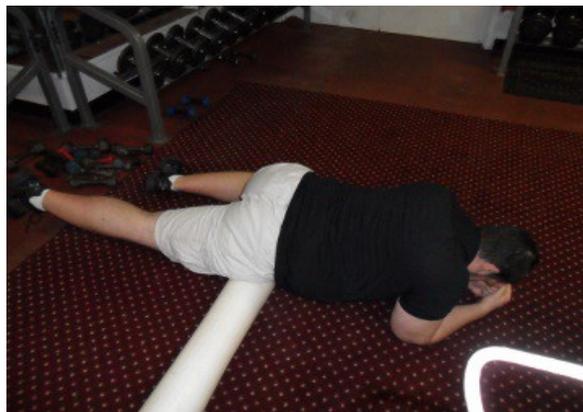


**Hip Flexors:** Coinciding with weak and inactive glutes is tight hip flexors. This combination can really result in back pain as it can create what's called *Anterior Pelvic Tilt*, which is where the front of the pelvis is tipped forward and the lower back is compressed. This results in the "bubble butt" pose you see a lot of people walk around with and is easily identified if someone's belt buckle is lower than the back of their belt.

As I said, it creates a lot of pressure on the lower back and is bad news.

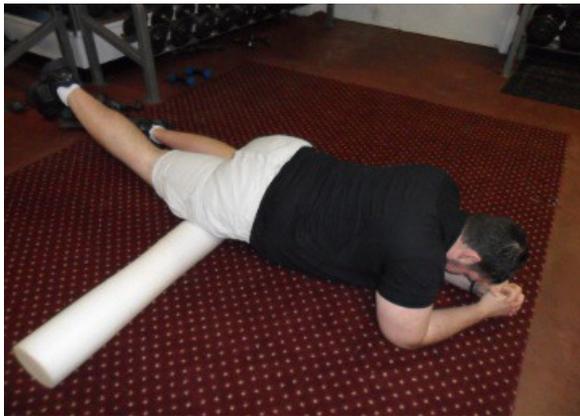
Chronically tight hip flexors are one of the primary culprits and they can be pretty tough to loosen up. Rolling them out with a foam roller or, even better, a ball can go a long way towards proper hip flexor function.

Lie face down and place either the ball or the roller under the hip flexor that you're rolling. Roll the implement up and down through the crease of your hip, both inside and outside of the top of the femur. Feel for any sensitive spots and really roll the crap out of them.



**Quadriceps:** Rolling the quads is similar to rolling on the hip flexors but you'll be running the length of your thigh from the hip flexors to the top of your knee. Pay special attention to the area right around the top of your knee. This area usually gets bound up and can contribute to knee pain. Don't flex your quads while you're rolling on them. Try to relax the front of your leg by slightly flexing your hamstrings and bending your knee a bit.

When you're in need of more pressure on your quads go from your elbows to the push-up position and hold your opposing leg off the ground while rolling.



**Calves:** Our calves get bound up a lot because of the constant repetition of walking as well as the shoes that we tend to wear, which usually have an elevated heel. Women, in particular, who wear heeled shoes on a regular basis tend to have lots of knots in their calves.

Tight calves pull down on tight hamstrings which in turn pull down on the lower back and create back pain. See how all of this is connected?

You can roll the calves with a foam roller by sitting down and placing the roller under your outstretched legs. Roll back and forth along your calves and be sure to turn your feet from side to side to get the sides of your legs. For a deeper roll cross your feet and work on one leg at a time with the weight of both legs on it.



You can also roll by hand with a softball or tennis ball. This lets you really get into areas that the roller has a hard time with. Using a ball also allows you to get into your anterior tibius muscle, along your shin. This isn't very convenient with a roller and can damage softer rollers very easily so I do recommend using the balls here.



**Feet:** Most people don't realize how many little muscles there are along the bottom of the feet and how tight their feet are. Cramming them into poorly designed shoes all day can result in tremendous shortening of the feet and some pretty aggressive trigger points that can end up causing problems all up and down the body as we talked about above with the calves.

To roll out the feet simply get a tennis ball and place it on the ground. Sit or stand over it and roll it all along the bottom of your feet. I prefer sitting so that your legs and calves can relax more. You should find some sensitive points to give some extra care to!



## [Lower Body Foam Rolling 101 Video](#)

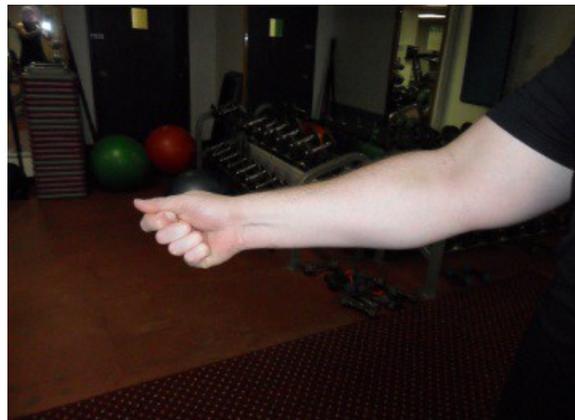
## Upper Body

**Triceps:** A lot of elbow pain can come from trigger points and knots in the triceps. These pull and constrict the tendons around the elbow and put pressure on the nerves that run through that area.

To work the outside of the triceps use a small ball against the wall. Simply place the ball against the wall, lean your triceps onto it, and roll your body up and down. Be sure to cover the area right below where your deltoid attaches to your arm as well as the deep belly of the tricep. Allow your elbow to bend slightly so that your tricep isn't flexed and can relax with the rolling.

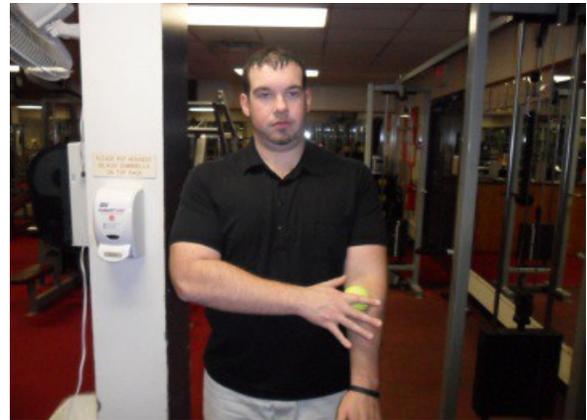


To work on the inner area of your triceps, close to the elbow, I recommend either rolling with a ball held in your hand or simply using your thumb in the “supported thumb” position.



**Biceps:** Rolling the biceps is pretty simple. Take a tennis ball in your opposite hand and roll the length of your bicep, paying attention to any sore areas.

**Forearms:** The forearms can take a lot of beating from resistance exercise as you spend so much time grasping weights and implements. As a result, they quickly can develop all kinds of knots and adhesions. Rolling the forearms is similar to the biceps. Use a small ball in your other hand and roll along the length of your forearms, both inside and outside.

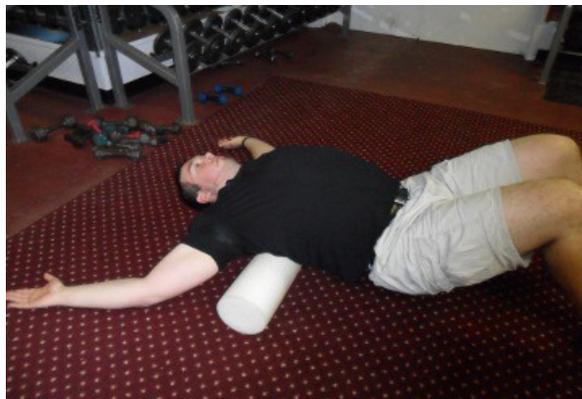


**Upper Back:** The trapezius, or “traps” and other muscles of the upper back store a lot of tension from the day, driving, and computer use. Knots and trigger points in this area can contribute to headaches, neck problems, and shoulder problems.

The easiest way to work on the upper back is to get a ball against the wall and lean back on it, working your body around until you find the spots that need attention. This is also a great area to use the TheraCane if you happen to have one, as it can really get into some hard to reach spots and give you quite a bit of control, but a tennis ball usually works just fine for me.

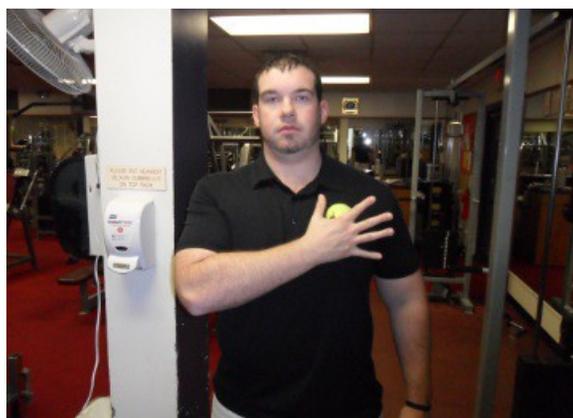


**Lower/Mid-Back:** The lower and mid-back can knot up as well, causing a lot of stiffness and pain. A foam roller is the tool of choice here. Simply lie down on the roller, perpendicular to your body. Start with your butt on the ground and lean back on the roller. Crossing your arms over your chest roll back and forth along your back. If you have any substantial back injury then I'd stay away from this until you had clearance from your medical professional, as it can put quite a bit of different pressures on the spine. Otherwise, this is a great way to build thoracic mobility and get your back loosened up.

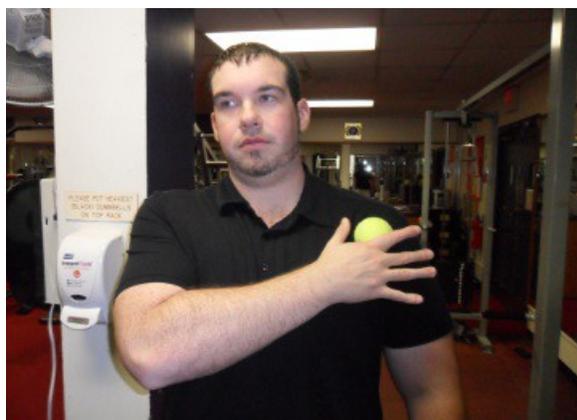


**Pectoral:** Most people don't think of their pecs as having any type of scar tissue or adhesions but if you do any sort of pressing (and most people do way too much), it's more than likely that your pecs are way too tight.

Roll the pecs out with a tennis ball simply by holding it in your opposite hand and working them over. Move your arm on the worked side around to different orientations to put the pecs into different states of stretch or relaxation to help find trigger points.



**Deltoids:** The deltoids are rarely the source of problems when it comes to myofascial issues, even of the arms and shoulders. However, they can get tight, particularly in strength training athletes, and a great delt massage feels awesome. The anterior (front) delts are easiest hit with a tennis ball held in the non-worked arm and rolled similarly to how you'd roll on the pecs. The medial (side) and posterior (rear) delts are best hit by placing the ball along the wall and leaning into it while moving your body up and down like you do for your triceps.



## [Upper Body Rolling 101 Video](#)

A sound soft-tissue recovery program will go a long way towards keeping you healthy, feeling good, and improving your athletic ability. In each of the programs I present here I have a specific soft-tissue program. As I said before, feel free to do extra myofascial release work if you feel that there is a certain area that is tight or bound up.

I also want to point out that this is a “working man's” version of soft-tissue release work. If you feel that you want to go into deeper detail with this type of thing I highly recommend that you find a chiropractor that is certified in Graston or Active Release Therapy (ART) or a Licensed Massage Therapist with a strong knowledge of Deep Tissue Massage and Trigger Point Therapy. They would be able to really point you in the right direction as far as resources to learn more.