

Roll Your Own

A daily, targeted massage with a foam roller is one of the best ways to prevent injuries.

by **MATT FITZGERALD**

INSTEAD OF STRETCHING before you work out, you should take a foam roller for a spin. Rolling is the single best way to simultaneously increase mobility, boost recovery, and prevent injury without weakening muscles pre-workout (as stretching has been shown to do). "The best time to roll is before activity," says Dean Somerset, a University of Alberta-trained physiologist and exercise expert, "as this helps to unlock stuck tissues that aren't gliding properly." Foam rolling works through the myofascia, a tough web around muscles. As you exercise, this supportive web gets inflamed, tightening up,

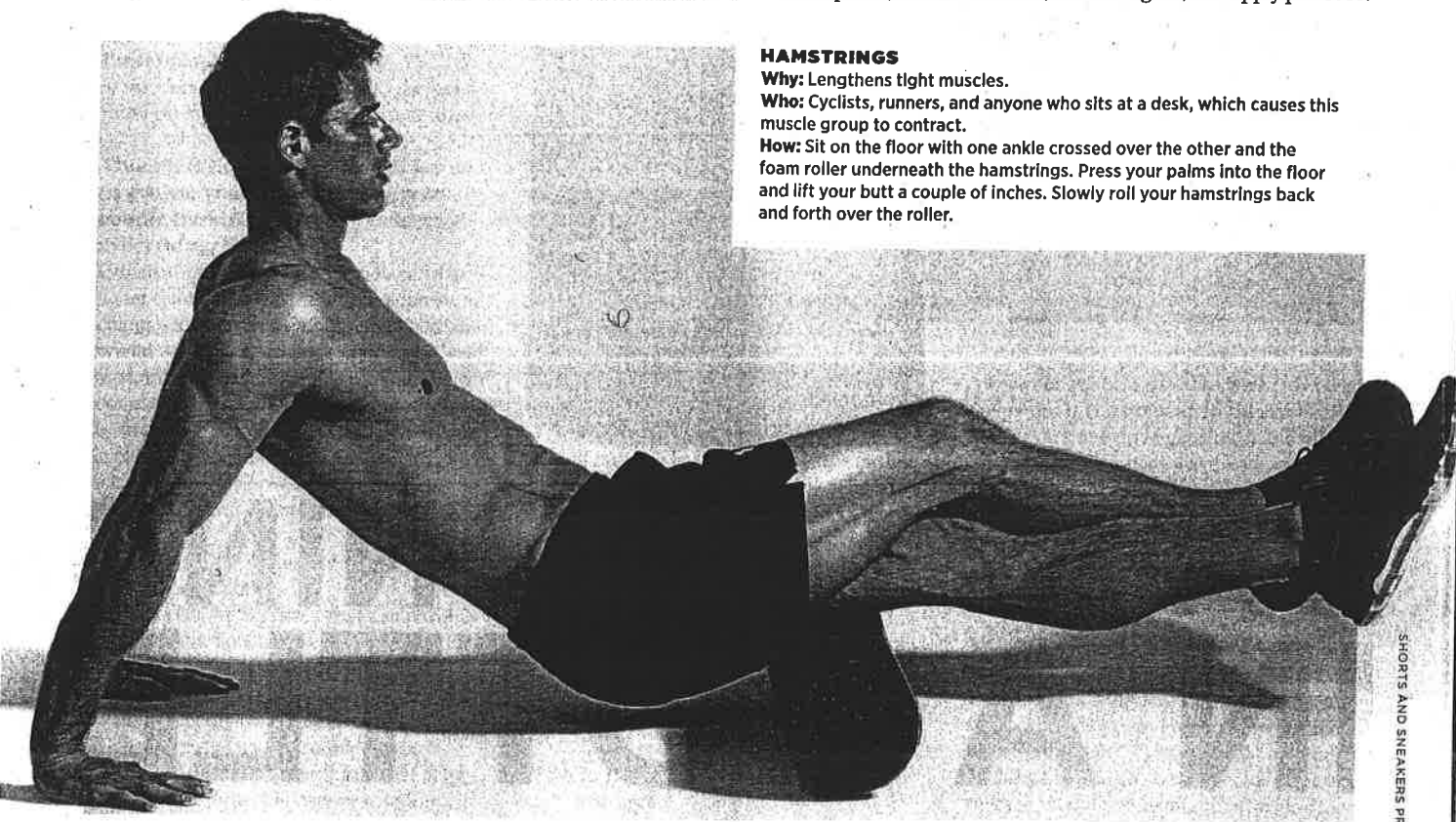
compromising muscle function, and increasing injury risk. The best way to get rid of this tightness is with a massage — in this case, using a \$40 piece of hard foam. While you will benefit from a general, full-body foam-roller program once a day (before and/or after workouts), it is best to target trouble spots, rolling the offending area for about 20 seconds at a time, and repeating until you lose the tightness. "Your body's going to tell you where you need it," says Karl Knopf, author of the *Foam Roller Workbook*. Meaning, when you find a knot, you want to pause, relax the muscle, roll through it, and apply pressure.

HAMSTRINGS

Why: Lengthens tight muscles.

Who: Cyclists, runners, and anyone who sits at a desk, which causes this muscle group to contract.

How: Sit on the floor with one ankle crossed over the other and the foam roller underneath the hamstrings. Press your palms into the floor and lift your butt a couple of inches. Slowly roll your hamstrings back and forth over the roller.

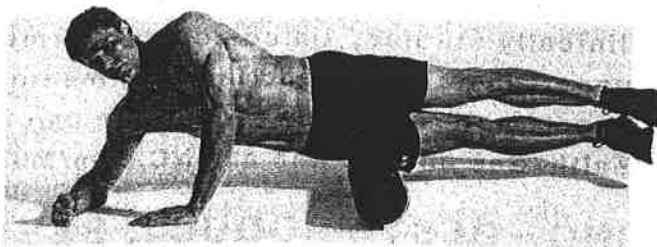


SHINS

Why: Increases ankle mobility by loosening the connecting muscles.

Who: Anyone who plays tennis, soccer, or other sports with common ankle-roll injuries.

How: Lie on your side with your forearm braced on the floor and the foam roller positioned underneath the outside of your shin. Roll your lower leg back and forth over the foam roller.



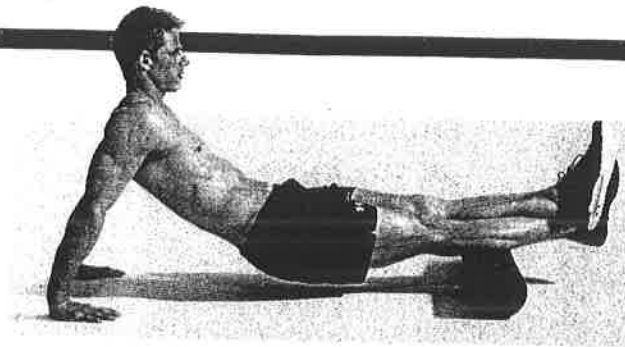
IT BAND

Why: Works tight spots out of the iliotibial (IT) band, the largest tendon in the body, and quads.

Who: Runners, who have chronically tight IT bands.

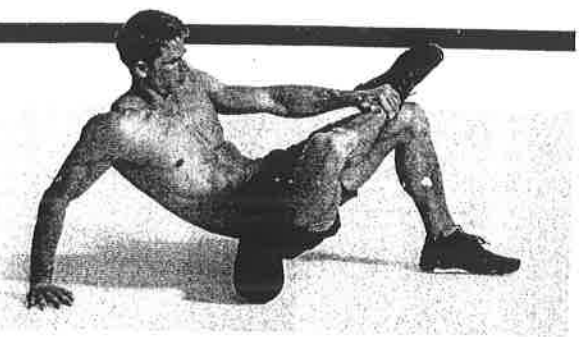
How: Lie on your side with your forearm propping up your torso and your leg resting on the foam roller just below the hip socket. Roll the outer thigh back and forth.

SHORTS AND SNEAKERS PROVIDED BY UNDER ARMOUR; FOAM ROLLER PROVIDED BY J/FIT.



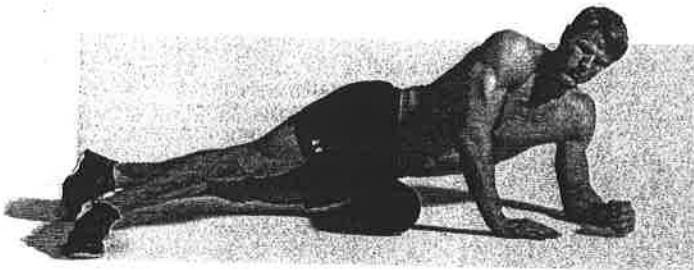
CALVES

Why: Improves elasticity in calf and Achilles tendon.
Who: Tennis and basketball players — and anyone who runs.
How: Sit with one ankle over the other and the foam roller underneath. Press your hands down, lift your butt, and roll your calf. When you find a painful spot, pause and flex your ankle in both directions.



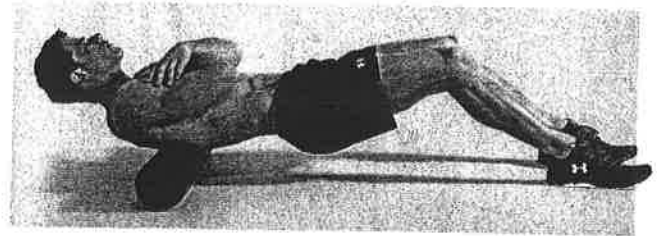
PIRIFORMIS

Why: Releasing painful trigger points in the buttocks, which can lead to hip and lower-back problems.
Who: Cyclists and people who do lots of squats or have lower-back issues.
How: Sit on the foam roller and cross your ankle over your thigh just above the knee. Put your weight onto one buttock. Roll back and forth. When you find a painful spot, pause there and try to relax your glutes.



HIP FLEXORS

Why: Helps the range of motion at the hip, which can increase running-stride length (and speed) and prevent hip flexor tendonitis.
Who: Runners, cyclists, and swimmers.
How: Lie with the roller under the front of your hip. Keep your opposite leg extended, with the hip rotated outward and the instep of the foot on the floor. Lift the other foot an inch or two and roll the hip back and forth.



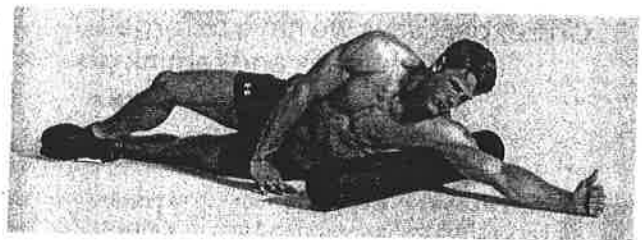
MID- AND UPPER BACK

Why: Working tight spots out of the mid- and upper-back muscles, which are also connected at neck and lower back.
Who: Everyone who works in an office and spends time in a chair.
How: Lie face-up with knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and your upper back on the foam roller. Lift your butt, cross your arms over your chest and, with a neutral neck, roll your mid- and upper back over the roller.



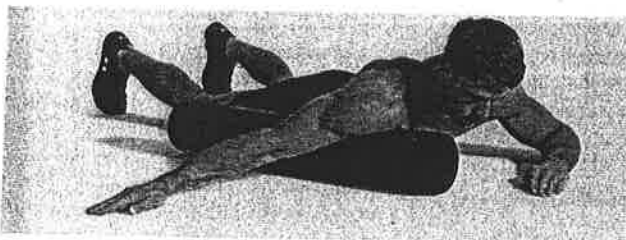
INNER THIGHS

Why: Increases mobility in the hip adductor muscles.
Who: Skiers, tennis players, and other lateral-motion athletes.
How: Lie facedown with forearms on the floor. Bend your knee slightly and rotate your hip outward. Put the foam roller underneath your inner thigh just above the knee, keeping your leg extended. Roll your inner thigh back and forth.



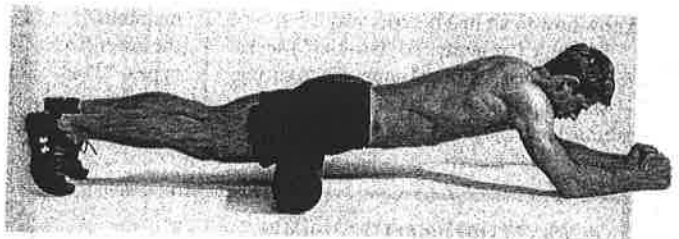
LATS

Why: Increasing overhead range of motion, as in for shooting baskets.
Who: Swimmers or anyone sore from bench pressing.
How: Lie on your side with your arm extended and the foam roller resting under your armpit. Press your opposite palm into the floor and lift your hips an inch or two above the floor. Roll your lats back and forth over the foam roller.



CHEST

Why: Loosens muscles in chest and thoracic-spine region.
Who: For those who bench press and focus on the upper body.
How: Lie facedown on the floor with your arm extended and the foam roller resting under the side of your chest, near the shoulder. Press your forearm into the floor and begin to roll the side of your chest back and forth, giving attention to painful spots.



QUADRICEPS

Why: Increasing range of motion at the knees without negatively affecting quad strength — as a basic quad stretch can.
Who: For athletes with high knee-injury rates, like basketball and soccer players, but also quad-reliant cyclists.
How: Lie facedown with your forearms on the floor and both thighs on the roller. Roll your quads back and forth, lingering on the most painful spots.