

Release Tension and Reduce Pain with Self-Massage

Do you find yourself trying to squeeze and massage your own shoulders, neck or back to release tension or reduce pain?. Do you ever feel a “twinge” somewhere in your body and think “Oh no! That’s going to set off a pain spiral!”. Self-massage can be a way to help cope with bodily pain and tension and even prevent injury.

Self-massage has many benefits:

- turns on the relaxing parasympathetic nervous system so it can help reduce tension and stress
- helps to release tight fascia, knots and adhesions resulting in reduced tightness or immobility in joints and muscles
- helps to improve blood flow to the area to help with recovery and pain reduction
- keeps your muscles stimulated and supple to help reduce recurrences of old injuries or development of new ones from unfamiliar movements like a new workout routine

There are lots of great tools to use in self-massage including *Foam Rollers*, *Theracane*, *The Stick* and lots of different sized *Balls* to name a few.

Self-Massage with Balls:

Use balls that are about 2-3 inches in diameter since they are easy to find - tennis balls, pinky balls, solid rubber balls all work well, and are extremely versatile.

When beginning a self-massage practice:

Start with a softer tool such as a tennis ball. Stay away from very firm balls such as lacrosse balls until you are quite experienced and know how your body will respond to the pressure. You don’t want to bruise yourself! If you have an acute injury or a very painful area, make sure you get advice from your health practitioner before massaging anywhere near that area of your body. Self-massage should feel stimulating and sometimes deep but should NEVER result in numbness, tingling or sharp painful sensations. If these occur, stop and move the ball to a new location until that sensation does not occur. Take it slow and massage for short 1-5 min sessions on one particular area until you know how your body will respond- when you stop rolling it should feel great not painful. Don’t roll unstable or nerve sensitive areas such as: tailbone, wrists, anterior hip joint or directly on or over your spine. Once you understand these parameters anything goes! If it feels good then it’s good! Explore and experiment to find areas that need attention or areas you didn’t even realize needed attention!

Let’s get started:

Feet- Rolling your feet not only stimulates and improves circulation and joint movement in your feet but is a great way to wake your whole body up! Place a ball on the ground and with bare feet or with socks on, roll the ball all over the bottom surface of your feet, toes to heels, side to side, circles etc. Put as much or as little pressure into the ball as feels comfortable. If you have very sensitive feet do this while sitting in a chair so it’s easier to control the pressure.

Hips and buttocks- Your lateral hip and gluteal muscles are likely tight and unhappy due to our sitting culture. Take a ball and place it between your right buttock and a wall. Imagine you have striped pants on and roll the ball back and forth along one “stripe” a few times, staying on the right side not crossing the

sacrum, and then move the ball up a level finding a new “stripe” and repeat the side to side rolling. Keep moving the ball up until you get close to the top of your pelvis. Whenever you find a tight or tender area pause and roll the ball in small circles over that area to encourage more release. Remember you are in charge of the amount of pressure- listen to your body! Switch to the left side and repeat.

Shoulders and upper back- Tension in this area often leads to neck pain, headaches and shoulder problems so release can feel amazing! Place a ball between you and a wall between your right shoulder blade and your spine. Leaning into the ball, bend and straighten your knees to roll the ball up and down this area. Pause in tight areas and take a couple of deep breaths with a little increase in pressure then resume rolling up and down. Switch to the other side and repeat.

Remember, feel free to experiment! There is no one right way to perform self-massage. However if you want more ideas and direction attend a class that includes self-massage. The more often you engage in self-massage the better your body will feel and move. As an added benefit, people who try these techniques report improved sleep and decreased stress, so give it a try!

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