

What is the best time to foam roll?

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These days, most people are familiar with foam rolling and its many benefits. But how and when to do it is less clear. Some experts advise foam rolling before a workout, and others say after is better. Some say foam rolling before bed is the secret to soothing sore muscles, and others might think morning is better.

But when you factor in the simple truth that most people are limited on time, it's necessary to optimize our time. So, when is the most beneficial? Well, it depends on the reason your foam rolling in the first place.

HOW FOAM ROLLING WORKS

First, let's clear up some things up about foam rolling in general. The biggest misconception with foam rolling is that people believe it's physically breaking up knots and smoothing out tissues. Many people imagine it almost like a rolling pin smoothing out dough. Unfortunately, that's not quite how it works.

Muscles don't have a brain of their own, so they can't choose to contract or relax without being told to by the nerves that connect to them. Think of muscles as puppets and the central nervous system as the puppet master. Unless the central nervous system leads the change, nothing happens to muscles.

Luckily, foam rolling has a direct impact on the central nervous system. Applying pressure onto a stressed muscle sends a message to the brain that the muscle is safe and it's OK to relax. That's why you don't want to go too hard when you're foam rolling, otherwise it could have the opposite effect.

Here's what you need to know about the timing of foam rolling relative to your specific needs.

FOR MOST PEOPLE, FOAM ROLLING IS BEST BEFORE A WORKOUT.

This is especially true if you're weightlifting, running, biking or any other sport where moving well is essential. Spending 10 minutes foam rolling before a workout will relax tense muscles, bring blood to the muscles you're about to use and improve your mobility.

SECOND, FOAM ROLLING, COMBINED WITH STRETCHING, HAS BEEN SHOWN TO BE ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS OF INCREASING FLEXIBILITY IN TIGHT MUSCLES.

Muscles often become short and overactive after we sit at a desk for long periods or from doing any repetitive movements. If these short muscles aren't restored to their normal length before a workout, then they can stress tissues and even pull joints out of optimal alignment. Foam rolling helps reduce the activity of these muscles, which allows them to stretch better and may prevent the excessive stress and tension on surrounding areas.

If you sit all day at work and/or practice a sport that requires optimal movement, foam rolling before working out is your best bet.