

Benefits of including self massage in fitness programs gaining acceptance

One of the great advancements in human strength and performance training has been the increased awareness of the importance of recovery and regeneration, this increase in awareness is well founded since gains from training are realized during periods of rest, not work.

Despite the lack of documented research specific to the benefits of self massage there has been a large influx of the use of self massage devices such as foam rollers, massage sticks, and other tools to assist in recovery and regeneration. While certainly no replacement for therapy performed by a licensed massage therapist, physical therapist, or athletic trainer, self massage utilizing these devices can easily be incorporated before and/or after training sessions, at bedtime or anytime during your recovery days. Along with hands on massage correctly applied self massage is now thought by many to benefit our biomechanical, physiological, neurological, and psychological systems.

The self massage process basically involves applying mechanical pressure to various parts of the body. This pressure is theorized to help prevent muscle stiffness and promote muscle compliance. From a circulatory standpoint self massage is thought to help with re-hydration, and general circulation potentially as an assist to warm up, cool down, and all around recovery. Psychologically most report an increase in relaxation of the muscles and an overall decrease in anxiety.

Some of the most common self massage tools are foam rollers, massage sticks and canes. To safely begin the use of self massage techniques you should be injury free, in good physical condition and be cleared for the activity by your doctor and/or therapist. After you are aware that you do not have any limitations you should receive instruction from someone familiar with self massage techniques.

Foam rollers are one of the most common self massage tools. Foam rollers will vary from 12 to 36 inches in length and about 3 to 6 inches in diameter. They are also available in a variety of densities and surface shapes. Generally the more muscle tone a person has the harder and more dense of a roller that person will use. The roller is usually used by placing the part or parts of the body that you are rolling on top of the roller while the roller is placed on the floor. At this point you simply roll back and forth with strokes of a variety of lengths adjusting the amount of pressure being applied to the area being rolled by partially suspending your weight off of the roller.

Massage sticks and canes are also popular tools for self massage. Massage sticks vary in length from 16" to 30" with a series of rolling elements placed between handles on each end of the stick. The various types of massage sticks available vary in flexibility and in the shape and type of rolling elements they employ depending on the function the massage stick is designed for. Massage canes allow the user to reach areas on the back side of the body and can be effective in focusing attention on smaller areas on the body. Massage sticks and canes are less demanding of their users from a skill and fitness stand point and are easier to pack for travel yet are still quite effective on most areas of the body.

If you are finding that your workout time is being maximized but the results you are attaining are not then better recovery could be the missing link needed in your training regimen and self massage could be an important element in that link.