

Foam Roller Stretch Class – Rock 'n Roll Stretch

Foam rollers have followed in the path of several other pieces of equipment used for therapy and are finding their way into fitness programs everywhere. If you are not incorporating them into your class, you soon will be, or should be. These inexpensive personal massage tools will help you and your clients with muscle recovery, soreness, injury prevention, flexibility training, and overall wellness. Foam rollers come in all different lengths, widths, and densities. This sample class will be based on a 6-inch round, 36-inch long roller. Rock 'n Roll stretch was developed to offer a more active stretch format that combines both self myofascial release and traditional stretching techniques. For the best results, use a variety of positions, planes, angles, and intensities. The foam roller is used for both body positioning and for active rolling. Unlike traditional stretch classes, participants should be encouraged to adjust positions often, add or remove body weight on the area being rolled, lighten and increase intensity, stabilize with the hands, feet, or other body parts, breathe consistently, and self-monitor for optimum effectiveness. This form of flexibility training is very different from the sleepy stretch classes of the past.

Basic Safety Considerations

1. Setup and transitions should be done slowly, always moving with control. It is important to explain the position, what muscle group is being worked, and what will be felt during the exercise.
2. Make sure to do the same exercises and spend the same amount of time on both sides.
3. Relax the muscle group you are working for better penetration. For less penetration, tighten the muscle group by flexing or contracting.
4. Allow your weight and pressure to enhance muscle compression. Do not use additional weight or allow another person to push you down for a deeper effect.
5. Alternate between the upper and lower body for balance and an increased effectiveness.
6. Allow enough time to position, roll, reposition, transition, and provide muscle recovery. Beginners may need additional time to become familiar with the foam roller.
7. Using the foam roller will cause some discomfort. Individuals will have different pain thresholds and areas of sensitivity. Be aware that compressing aggressively or for too long can lead to bruising or injury. It is better to return to an area for additional work than to push too hard.
8. Do not roll on joints or put yourself in a compromising position that may increase the risk of injury.

9. Customize positions to best suit your body and flexibility level.
10. Continuous breathing is very important.
11. Hydrate often.

Music

What makes this class very enjoyable is that you can use any type of music you or your students may like to hear. It may be difficult to have the entire class roll on the beat all the time. Encourage rolling at your own pace if it is on or off the music. What works best is mid-beat to slow music at 60-120 beats per minute. Experiment with your BPM and see what works best for your group.

Warm up

Flexibility training will be more effective when the body's core temperature is bit elevated. A good warm up for this class format should incorporate dynamic movement, involve both upper and lower body active stretches, utilize larger and smaller muscle groups, and include full-range-of-motion exercises. Ten to twelve minutes should be enough to prepare the body. Try to use the foam roller in the warm up as a balance tool, a prop, or for some light rolling. An example of this is a series of rear lunges while holding the foam roller with the hands on both ends. Squeeze the roller between the hands after each alternating rear lunge and add an overhead press to help warm up the shoulders. Another effective exercise is to do a series of squats with the foam roller placed on the quads. Stretch out the back and roll on the quads using the forearms to push and move the foam roller from the hip flexors down the quads.

[Exercises below are grouped according to position and use of the foam roller]

Position One – Seated on the floor with the foam roller under the hamstrings

1. Hamstring roll and stretch – Position the foam roller under the hamstrings. Balance the body's weight on the hands and hamstrings. Roll from the glutes to the back of the knees. Reposition roller higher or lower on the hamstrings as needed. Externally rotate the leg from

- the hip while rolling on the hamstrings, then repeat with an internal rotation.
2. L-position – Seated on the floor, place the foam roller under the ankles and fully extend the legs. Make sure the body is seated upright and can bend at the hips. Lengthen the back and press the chest towards the legs. Once you reach the lowest position, breathe deep, exhale, compress, and push a bit lower. Add a flexed foot or tightened quad to deepen the stretch. Ease off the stretch, reposition, and do it again. You can repeat this stretch as many times as you need to release tight muscles. Try this same exercise with the hips elevated on the foam roller and the feet parallel in front of the body on the floor.
 3. Seated square 4 position – While seated on the foam roller, place one ankle on the quad of the opposite leg. The support leg will be in an approximately 90 degree angle. Relax the elevated leg at the hip, roll on to the hip of the bent leg and move back and forth on the roller. If you are on the left glute, the left hand will be on the floor behind the body to support the body weight and help with the rolling.
 4. Iliotibial band – Side laying on the outside of the quad, position the body with the elbow or hands on the floor and the roller at about the hip. Roll down the side of the leg with the legs held together. If the intensity is too great, place the top leg on the floor, either in front or behind the lower leg, to relieve some body weight and pressure on the muscle group.
 5. Calf – With the body seated on the floor and the roller under the gastrocnemius, balance on both hands, tighten the core, and roll over the calf area. Move from the back of the knees down to the lower leg. For additional variations, unilateral work can be done with one leg on the roller and the other set on the floor on the same side as the hands. Add pressure on the muscle by pushing down while rolling. Roll on the inside and outside part of the calf.
 6. Butterfly stretch – Seated on the floor, with the bottoms of the feet together on the foam roller, squeeze the glutes and press the thighs towards the ground. Keep the knees at a 90 degree angle to reduce joint stress. Try this exercise while seated on the roller, with the feet on the floor. Add a hip rollback to change hip position and rotation for the stretch.

Position Two – In an all fours position, with the foam roller under the hands

1. Hip flexors – Place one foot on the end of the roller and one knee on the floor. Press hips toward the ground. Squeeze the buttocks to extend the hips. Increase intensity and add balance by lifting onto the support foot. This should resemble a deep lunge position. Release and return to the original position, change the foot position, and repeat on the other side.
2. Quad roll – Balancing on the elbows, face down with the quads on the foam roller, work up and down the muscle group. To add emphasis, you can cross the legs or add weight on one side. Externally rotate and internally rotate the leg at the hip to vary the work on the quad.
3. Tibialis anterior – In an all fours position, with the roller positioned under one ankle, lift the body and apply pressure to the muscular part of the shin. Roll from knee to ankle, using body weight for pressure.
4. Forearms – In an all fours position, with the rollers under the forearms, roll back and forth with the palms facing up and then down. Add pressure by allowing more body weight to be used.
5. Shoulder release – In an all four position, place hands on top of the roller on the very ends. Drop hips back away from the roller and lower the forehead to the ground, extending the shoulders and opening up the chest. Slide the roller a bit further away from the body and repeat the stretch.

Position Three – In a side saddle position, with roller on one side of the body

1. Triceps – Lying on one side, with the roller under the triceps, roll from the elbow to the armpit. Support the body weight with the opposite arm in front of the body.
2. Biceps – Rotate the arm so that the roller is positioned under the biceps. Carefully lift and lower the body to roll over the biceps from the deltoid to the bend in the arm.
3. Deltoid – With the hands together and the deltoid on top of the roller, gently roll the length of the deltoid. Use the abdominals and core to bend the body and position the rolling movement on the deltoid.

Position Four – Laying on top of the foam roller, with the roller supporting the head to the tailbone

1. Shoulder extension – Raise both arms overhead, reaching the back of the hands to the floor. Try to keep the back in a neutral position. Breathe deeply and relax the chest and shoulders. Reposition and do the exercise again. Stretch the chest muscles by placing the hands behind the ears, expanding the chest, and opening the elbows to the floor.
2. Back roll – Rolling laterally, from one shoulder blade to the other, use the legs and hands to balance on the foam roller while you focus on the entire back side of the body.
3. Adductor – Facing down, with the foam roller pressed up against one adductor, roll along the adductor muscle, supporting the body's weight on the elbows and the opposite leg.

Although a formal cool down is not necessary, the last few minutes of class can be a great time to add something different and fun. Try doing some personal massage, breathing exercises, balance work, core strength, relaxation time, or include some traditional upper body stretches.