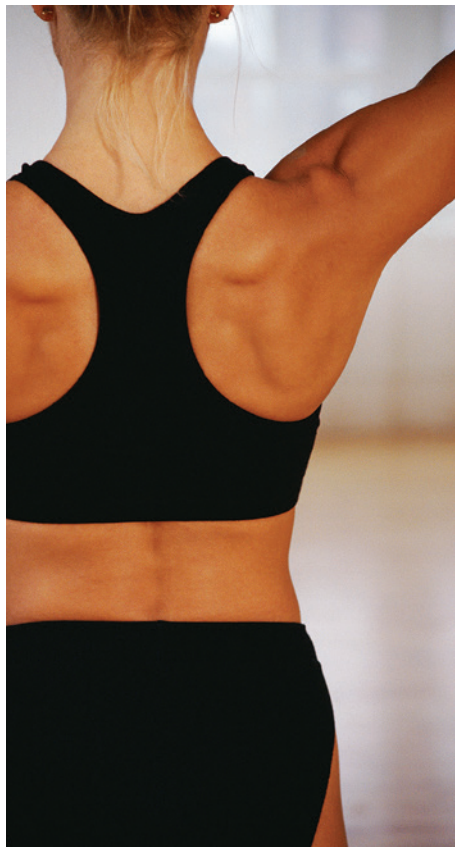


## Optimize Health and Workout Gains with Self-Myofascial Release

by Rowena Cua and Rosemarie Cua-De Leon

Self-myofascial release (SMR) addresses the body's fascial system, commonly overlooked in its significance. Fascia is a fluid connective tissue that surrounds and interconnects every muscle, organ, nerve, blood vessel and cell within us; it is what holds the entire body together, providing stability, structural support and cushioning.

Tight fascia can pull bones out of alignment, compress joint surfaces and contribute to arthritic changes and the presence of herniated discs related to low back pain and other joint pain. Over time, poor tissue health and postural alignment will take a toll on commonly painful shoulders, hips and knees. Restricted fascia will affect flexibility, balance and overall stability, and will limit the ability to burn fat and build strength.



SMR is a relatively simple technique that both sedentary and active individuals can use to alleviate trigger points, tightness, scar tissue or areas of soreness. With everyday use, repetitive stress, physical trauma or inflammation, fascia can develop micro tears and lose its pliability. When tears don't heal properly, they form adhesions. These adhesions, or restrictions, resemble balls of yarn and can keep muscles from working the way they are supposed to.

SMR works to iron out the "knots" by applying the desired amount of pressure with our body weight onto self-treatment tools such as foam rollers, four-inch inflated treatment balls or tennis/lacrosse/golf balls. Specially designed Theracanes can be used in designated areas to actively control areas of pressure with our own hands. The surface area to be treated largely determines what equipment will be used. The foam roller, for example, is a popular method for larger areas such as the iliotibial band, quadriceps and hip adductors, whereas a tennis ball is often used to release the plantar fascia, tibialis anterior and wrist extensors. Any of the treatment balls can be used throughout the entire body, as they are highly effective and inexpensive.

Traditional stretching cannot remove adhesions. Doing so would be like tying a rope into a knot, stretching it and hoping to relieve the tension. SMR helps to relieve tension in not only the specific area being released, but also in interconnected fascial tissue. For example, rolling a ball beneath the foot for at least five minutes can alleviate tension in the calf or hamstring and improve flexibility in surrounding tissues. Addressing tight pecs that pull the shoulders forward can improve our posture and the function of our chest and back before initiating exercise. These often undetected restrictions will keep our body from living up to its

potential for innate, strong and natural movement.

In addition to releasing these adhesions, SMR aids in preventing injuries; increases blood flow, which helps for faster recovery from workouts; reduces soreness from workouts; improves the body's ability to eliminate waste; physically de-stresses the body so it can work more efficiently; increases flexibility; and improves overall focus and concentration, because fascial restrictions also extend into the brain.

For those that lift weights, play sports or are involved in marathons, Spartan races, Ironman, Tough Mudder events, MMA fighting or any other form of martial arts, SMR is essential to enhancing and achieving optimal performance. Many athletes take supplements and undergo different forms of dietary measures to enhance their health, but those nutrients are not effectively reaching areas where they need to be when fascial restrictions exist. No form or diet or exercise is complete without addressing fascial restrictions that are limiting our body's true, full working potential.

A skilled John F. Barnes-trained myofascial release therapist can detect individual fascial restrictions and postural imbalances. Self-MFR is a great form of self-care, but is most highly effective in conjunction with getting the proper manual treatment and full evaluation from a qualified MFR therapist.

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