

Self Myofascial Release with Tennis Ball to Release Muscle Tension

Dr. Heather Morales, DC, MS, CKTP

Foam rollers are a little big to travel with and take to places other than the gym or home. The same type of myofascial exercise can be conveniently done with tennis balls, lacrosse balls, golf balls, and even roller hockey balls (the harder the ball the better the result, but more sensitive to pain). I will go over the areas that you can use the tennis ball (or whichever ball you choose), and discuss some injuries you can prevent from occurring. For each area, you will lie on the spot for 10-15 seconds at the “sore areas” of the muscle group. I like to do this two to three times to get the full benefit before and after my workday or workouts.

UPPER BODY

Myofascial release of the upper body (from the wrists to the back of the head) will result in pain relief for conditions such as: carpal tunnel syndrome, outside elbow pain, inside elbow pain, headaches, TMJ dysfunction, neck pain, shoulder tension, shoulder impingement syndrome, posture correction, and thoracic outlet syndrome. The following images will show you the exact position.



Keep the chin tucked to avoid strain on the front of the neck.



You can also use the other hand to extend each individual finger backwards to reach each tendon more specifically.



You may also hang the wrist off a desk or table to allow even more pressure into the muscles and achieve better results



The tennis ball will be closest to the shoulder joint and away from the spine to focus on the insertion points of the rotator cuff muscles.



You will start closest to the arm pit and then end up where the tennis ball is in the picture to cover the entire latissimus dorsi.



The tennis ball will be closest to the shoulder joint like the picture above, except now the angle of the arm is different to cover the different muscles of the rotator cuff.



The tennis ball will be closest to the spine and on the inside of the scapula (shoulder blade).



The pec is the focus of this tennis ball exercise. Use a corner of a door or wall, and turn the head away from the side being stretched.



“One parallel that may help to see (the fascial proliferation in the body) this is an orange: the rind, pith, and the walls between the sections would all be like the fascia of the body.”

Thomas Myers



LOWER BODY

Myofascial release of the lower body (lower back down to the feet) will help relieve and prevent conditions such as: IT Band syndrome, lateral knee pain, patella-femoral syndrome, plantar fasciitis, sciatica, low back pain, hip pain, piriformis syndrome, shin splints, and achilles tendonitis to name a few.



(Feet are flat on the ground with knees bent, can bring one knee to chest to reach deeper back muscles)



(Don't go all the way to the hip or directly over the knee joint, this will cause irritation of the bursa at the joints)



(Turn the toes out and roll on the outside of the leg to reach the muscle group affected; bring the toes back and also point downward)



(Lean toward the side the leg is crossed over the other leg)



(Do not step fully on the tennis ball, keep most of weight on the leg that is not on the ball, and the leg that is on the ball should put just enough pressure to feel the sore areas of tension. Make sure to point toes downward and to also bring toes back towards head to reach all muscles)



The ball will be in the middle and middle-inside of the calf, with the other leg over the affected leg. This will allow for deeper release of muscle tension. The toes should point upward towards head and also down towards the ground.

Remember a few things:

- You may feel slight discomfort where the tennis ball is hitting the trigger points.
- You should take deep breaths in and out to allow relaxation and better results.
- If the pain is too unbearable, you should put a hand towel over the ball or switch back to a foam roller.
- You shouldn't have any significant bruising. This is a sign you are pressing TOO hard over the area and may cause tissue damage.

Consult your physician if you have any other questions before beginning these exercises