Learn if Vibrating Foam Rollers are Worth It

Description

Foam rollers have long been used to loosen athletes up before and after workouts. Recently Vibrating Foam Rollers have hit the scene to loosen up deeper muscle tissue.

Ian Sharman, an ultrarunner and endurance coach, completed the Double Boston last month, running slower from the city center to the Boston Marathon start line in nearby Hopkinton before looping around to partake in the main marathon. Sharman used his high-end foam roller, the HyperIce Vyper 2, which has a rechargeable battery to generate vibration, to help him heal when he returned home to Bend, Oregon.

Sharman has been using foam rollers for a decade to break up muscular tension and manage sore spots. Still, in the last two years, he has joined a growing number of notable personalities in his regimen, including Lindsey Vonn, Tom Brady, and Laird Hamilton. Sharman claims it is similar to massage's myofascial release (the breakdown of tight muscular tissue) but more strength. "It's like a jackhammer ripping up the asphalt," he describes it.

In the early 2000s, there was a lot of buzz about how whole-body vibration plates may improve health and fitness. According to certain research, it may help to reduce muscle soreness and keep you loose after a strenuous workout. There was even talk of quick fat loss, muscular toning, and increased calorie expenditure. As a casual athlete, I recall trying one of the devices. Unfortunately, the vibration ricocheted through my gut as I executed a situp, causing an intense want to poop. Aside from the pain, these standing plates were also expensive and clumsy, and they quickly fell out of favor.

Today, interest in vibration is resurging as athletes recognize the importance of healing as part of their total training regimen and have grown more ready to invest in new goods and procedures that are supposed to aid in that effort. Targeted vibration and the plethora of smaller gadgets that provide it is one of the key approaches. Vonn has supported the HyperIce product line, including a vibrating massage ball and a gadget like a power drill. TriggerPoint created a vibrating version of its well-known Grid roller. According to TheraGun, its handheld G2PRO is used by more than 100 professional sports teams (and has the sideline pictures to prove it). Brady's fitness line, TB12, has released a roller and ball. The devices aren't cheap—prices range from $100 to $600—but they're more accessible, practical, and, many athletes believe, more targeted than heavy-duty gym vibration plates.

Smaller-scale vibration treatment, according to proponents, zeroes in on-issue locations, effectively increasing circulation, relaxing and loosening muscles, reducing discomfort, and improving range of motion. According to Mark Coberley, associate athletics director for sports medicine at Iowa State University and a board member of the National Athletic Trainers' Association, it can warm up the muscles before an exercise and reduce discomfort later. He employs constant vibration at low rates to relax muscles and at high speeds to break down adhesions. "We have several kinds of rollers to help after intense exercises," Coberley explains, "but we probably use the vibrating ones the most."

The question is whether it acts as a performance booster, a recovery booster, or both. According to Lee Brown, a sports scientist at California State University, Fullerton, the evidence for the therapy, in general, is that muscles respond to vibration by contracting and relaxing. However, most studies have focused on whole-body vibration rather than the more tailored type these devices provide. According to Brown, the basic vibration process should be the same whether delivered to the entire body or focused on one muscle or body portion at a time.

When it comes to its possible influence before a workout, Brown adds, "the vibration sends signals to the muscle to contract, blood flow to the muscle rises, and it results in a warmer muscle." He and other researchers have discovered that whole-body vibration is akin to an active warmup, such as a light jog.

According to Nicole Dabbs, an associate professor of kinesiology at California State University, San Bernardino, some studies have demonstrated increases in flexibility, power, and strength with this approach. Still, there isn't enough evidence to make it conclusive.

Then there's the recovery period. According to Dabbs, research in this area is also confusing. For example, a 2014 review found that it resulted in a slight reduction in muscle soreness. Still, a study conducted just one year later by Dabbs and colleagues found that the scientific support for most treatments (including vibration therapy) used to prevent exercise-induced muscle pain is "inconsistent and underwhelming." However, several research focusing on targeted vibration has generated intriguing results in applying vibration in hyperspecific settings. One study, for example, focused on downhill running and discovered that it aided runners in recovering faster.

The present corpus of research, while still modest, suggests that acute vibration therapy may aid with range of motion and blood flow, but not so much with recovery. In other words, there is reason to suspect that, despite its potential, further research is needed to understand the efficacy of this medication completely. Dabbs likes the phrase "possible performance tool" over "performance assist" in this context. She says that vibration treatment is unlikely to harm you or your fitness, but you shouldn't expect it to be a cure-all based on existing research.

Category

1. Lifestyle

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