Mat and Roller
A DETAILED GUIDE FOR PRACTICING PILATES
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The Foam Roller

The humble Foam Roller began its career as packing material before it was adopted as an exercise tool by physical therapists, Feldenkrais practitioners and Pilates instructors in search of ways to provide balance and stability challenges for their students. The foam roller is now used in Pilates mat classes, Pilates equipment classes, personal training sessions, physical therapy sessions and by home users around the world.

Benefits of the Foam Roller

- Dynamic stabilization - The roller is a moving platform that lets you know when you are stable and when you are not. This feedback helps to train both the muscles and the nervous system to respond efficiently to dynamic surfaces such as moving cars, subway trains, skis, bicycles etc.
- Balance - The unstable quality of the roller helps you to train your balance to keep you moving safely through life.
- Myofascial release and self massage - Myofascial release is a form of self massage that helps you to release areas of chronic tension in order to move with efficiency and ease.
- Variety and fun - The roller provides plenty of opportunities for new exercise experiences to keep your workout fresh and inspiring.

Choosing a Foam Roller

The standard foam roller is 36” long and 6” in diameter. For this manual we are using the Balanced Body Magic Roller® which is a great all purpose roller.

Other Foam Roller options include:

- Extra Soft Roller - Good for sensitive students while allowing the full range of exercises to be performed.
- White Roller - Provides a firmer texture for increased pressure with release work and a greater balance challenge. Tend to break down over time.
- Black Roller - A very firm, long lasting roller for students who want a more intense experience.
- Inflatable Roller - Great for students who are sensitive to pressure on their spine or sacrum and who want a roller to travel with. Can be too soft to perform some exercises.
- 12” X 6” Roller - Great for doing some exercises on and for traveling.
- 36” X 4” Roller - The smaller diameter makes some students more secure because they are closer to the floor. This size works well for neck releases but is not appropriate for all of the exercises.
- Half Round Rollers - Provide a safer surface for standing exercises and can be used by beginners.
The Abdominal Curls on the roller add an element of balance making these more challenging than abdominal curls on the mat.

**Starting Position**

Lie supine on the roller and orient it lengthwise from head to tail. Place your feet on the ground with your knees bent and support the head in your hands with the elbows wide.

**Abdominal Curl**

**Movement Sequence**

» Exhale – Lift the upper body off the roller by drawing the ribs toward the hips and peeling the back off the roller.

» Inhale – Lower the upper body back to the starting position.

» Repeat 6-10 times.

**Variations**

Legs wide: Place the feet shoulder width apart for the most secure stance.

Legs together: Bring the legs together to challenge the balance.

Toes or ball of foot on floor: Place just the toes or the balls of the feet on the mat to increase the stability challenge.

One leg up: Lift one leg off the floor into a chair position or a straight leg as you roll up to challenge the balance even more.

**Modifications**

Tall person: If you or a client are too tall to be supported on the roller, you can put two rollers together end to end to support the head.
**Cueing and Imagery**

» Peel the back off the roller one vertebra at a time.

» Keep the pelvis and low back still throughout each exercise.
  › Imagine you are balancing a glass of water on your abdomen. Don’t spill it as you curl up.

» Lift the upper body up without pulling on the neck.
  › Keep a light touch on the back of the head as if your head was a feather.

**Purpose**

» Strengthen the abdominals.

» Teach pelvic stability.

**Precautions**

Back problems - Be sure the low back stays stable throughout the exercise or avoid.

Avoid with osteoporosis.

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The hip and leg series helps to increase flexibility and improves pelvic stability and core strength. This sequence is based on the leg work on the Step Barrel.

Starting Position
Lie supine with the roller crosswise under the hips and the upper back and neck comfortably supported on the mat.

Psoas/Hamstring Stretch

Movement Sequence
» Inhale and Exhale – Straighten one leg down along the floor to stretch the psoas and hip flexors and reach the other leg up to the ceiling to stretch the hamstrings. Place your hands behind the thigh of the leg that is reaching up to the ceiling.
» Repeat for 3 to 8 breaths.

Modifications
Tight hamstrings: Start with the leg that is reaching up to the ceiling bent and gradually straighten the knee until you feel the stretch on the hamstring.

Psoas only: Keep the top knee bent to focus on the psoas alone.

Hip Sways

Movement Sequence
» Exhale – Start with both knees bent and the feet off the floor in a chair position.
» Inhale – Rotate the torso and lower both knees toward one side.
» Exhale – Draw the abdominals in to bring the legs back to the starting position.
» Switch sides.
» Repeat 4-8 times in each direction.

Variations
Pelvic Clock: Roll the sacrum in a circle on the roller rather than just moving side to side.

Straight legs: Straighten both legs for either the Knee Sways or the Pelvic Clock.
**Scissors**

**Movement Sequence**

- Inhale and Exhale – Straighten both legs up toward the ceiling and reach one leg down toward the floor as you reach the other leg up toward the ceiling.
- Switch legs.
- Repeat 10-20 sets.

**Bicycle**

**Movement Sequence**

- Inhale and Exhale – From the Scissors exercise, pedal the legs in both directions working to stretch the hip flexors and hamstrings as much as possible.
- Repeat 4-8 times in each direction.

1 Scissors - Starting Position.

2 Reach the left leg up toward your head and the right leg down toward the floor.

3 Switch the legs.

1 Bicycle - Starting Position

2 Bicycle the right leg in toward the chest.

3 Straighten the right leg as you reach the left leg toward the mat.
**Bookends**

**Movement Sequence**

» Inhale – Straighten both legs up toward the ceiling and open them out to the sides.

» Exhale – Engage the abdominals and return the legs to the starting position.

» Repeat 10 times.

**Circles**

**Movement Sequence**

» Inhale – Straighten both legs up toward the ceiling and circle them out to the side.

» Exhale – Engage the abdominals and continue to circle the legs back to the starting position.

» Switch directions.

» Repeat 4-8 times.

**Variations**

Leg Lowers: With the legs straight and together, reach them up toward the ceiling and lower then toward the floor without changing the position of the back.

1 Bookends - Starting Position

2 Open the legs out to the sides.

1 Circles and Leg Lowers - Starting Position

2 Circle the legs out to the sides.

3 Circles – Circle the legs down toward the floor.

2 Leg Lowers – Lower the legs toward the floor.
**Helicopter**

**Movement Sequence**

» Inhale and Exhale – Straighten both legs up toward the ceiling and circle one leg down and one leg up. Reverse the legs 3 times then switch the legs as in the Scissors exercise and repeat.

» Switch directions

» Repeat 4-8 times.

1. Helicopter - Starting Position

2. Split the legs with the left leg up and the right leg down.

3. Circle the legs to the sides.

4. Continue to circle the legs until the right leg is up and the left leg is down.

**Variations**

Change hip rotation: Hips can be in internal, external or neutral hip rotation for all of the exercises except the bicycle.

**Cueing and Imagery**

» Keep the back of the sacrum stable as you move the legs.

» Move the hips smoothly in all directions.

› Reach the legs away from a stable center.

» Keep the shoulders and neck relaxed as the legs move.

**Purpose**

» Strengthen the legs including the hamstrings, hip flexors and adductors.

» Stretch the hamstrings, hip flexors and adductors.

» Teach pelvic stability.

**Precautions**

Low back and hip problems - Make sure the low back and hips are comfortable or adjust the range of motion.
The Back Plank series consists of advanced exercises that strengthen the shoulders and the back of the body including the triceps, back extensors, gluteals and hamstrings.

**Scapula Glides**

**Starting Position**

Sit on the roller with the legs straight and the hands on the roller.

**Movement Sequence**

- Inhale – Press the hands into the roller and lift the hips off the roller.
- Exhale – Keeping the hips slightly forward of the roller, slide the shoulders up as the hips lower.
- Inhale – Slide the shoulder blades down and lift the hips up over the roller.
- Repeat 6 to 10 times.

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**Back Plank**

**Starting Position**

Sit on the mat with the roller under the ankles and the arms beside the torso with the hands on the mat.

**Movement Sequence**

- Inhale – Press the hips up toward the ceiling until the torso is in a straight line from the feet to the shoulders.
- Exhale – Lower the hips back toward the mat.
- Repeat 4 to 6 times.
Leg Pull Up

Starting Position
Sit on the mat with the roller under the ankles and the arms beside the torso with the hands on the mat.

Movement Sequence
» Exhale – Press the hips up toward the ceiling until the torso is in a straight line from the feet to the shoulders.
» Inhale – Kick one leg up toward the ceiling and pulse it two times with a sniffing breath.
» Exhale – Bring the leg back to the roller.
» Repeat to the other side.
» Do a total of 3 sets on each leg alternating sides.
The Mermaid is used to stretch the side of the torso and helps to loosen up the spine and decrease tension in the lower back.

**Starting Position**

Sit with both knees bent and the left foot resting against the top of the right thigh. Place both sit bones on the mat if you can. If not, keep the right sit bone as close to the mat as possible. Place the roller on the left side of the torso and reach the right arm out to the side.

**Movement Sequence**

- **Inhale** – Roll the roller away as you laterally flex the torso and reach the free arm up and over the torso.
- **Exhale** – Rotate the torso toward the floor keeping both sit bones reaching toward the mat.
- **Inhale** – Rotate the torso back to the front.
- **Exhale** – Roll the roller toward you and stretch the torso to the other side as the arm reaches overhead.
- **Repeat** 4-6 times.

**Variations**

Diagonal Mermaid: Place the roller in front of the forward knee with both hands on the roller. Roll it forward to stretch the back of the hip and the lower back. Lift the back leg as you roll the roller forward.

1 Mermaid - Starting Position

2 Roll the roller away as you side bend to the left.

3 Rotate towards the roller.

1 Diagonal Mermaid - Starting Position

Roll down over the front leg as you roll the roller away.
**Advanced Mermaid**

This is based on the choreography from the Advanced Mermaid on the Trapeze Table.

**Starting Position**

Sit with both legs straight out in front and the roller to the side or with both knees bent as in Mermaid above.

**Movement Sequence**

- **Inhale** – Place one hand on the roller and roll it away as you swing the legs to the side and reach them out into a straight line.
- **Exhale** – Engage the abdominals, pull the roller in and swing the legs back to the front to return to the starting position.
- **Repeat 2-3 times on each side.**

**Cueing and Imagery**

- Keep the torso straight with the hips facing sideways as you laterally flex the torso.
- Keep the scapula depressed and the shoulder connected to the torso as you roll the roller away.

**Purpose**

- Stretches the sides of the torso.
- Strengthens scapular stability.
- Strengthens pelvic stability.
- Increase shoulder range of motion.

**Precautions**

Shoulder and wrist problems – Avoid the advanced Mermaid.

Low back problems – The back must be comfortable with lateral flexion. The Advanced Mermaid is challenging to the stability of the lower back.
The iliotibial band or ITB is a very tough band of connective tissue that will directly affect the alignment of the knee and the hip if it is too tight. This exercise is the most effective way to change the tension in this area.

**Starting Position**

Place the roller under the side of the thigh. Support the torso by placing the forearm on the mat with the elbow and shoulder in line and lift up the underside of the torso. Engage the abdominals to keep the torso in one long line.

For a gentler massage, place the top foot on the mat in front of the bottom leg. For a more intense experience place both legs on the roller with the inner thighs together.

**Movement Sequence**

- **Inhale and Exhale** – Keep the torso in one line and roll the side of the thigh over the roller by pulling the elbow toward the hip.
- To target the medial and lateral edges of the ITB, roll towards the front or back of the thigh. Spend extra time on spots that feel particularly tight.
- Avoid rolling over the side of the knee and the greater trochanter.
- Roll for 30 seconds to 2 minutes on each side.

**Cueing and Imagery**

- Picture the IT band lengthening as you roll on it.
  - Like a rubber band that is slowly being stretched to a new length.
- Keep the shoulders wide, the neck long and the abdominals supported.
- Keep breathing!

**Purpose**

- A tight ITB is a very common source of knee, lateral hip and sacroiliac joint pain. Rolling this area out 3 to 4 times per week can be very helpful for these conditions.
- Releasing tension and fascial adhesions in the Rectus femoris, vastus medialis, vastus lateralis, vastus intermedius, sartorius and iliotibial band.
- Strengthen scapular stabilizers.
- Strengthen the core stabilizers.
- Improve function and range of motion of the knee.

**Precautions**

- Neck, shoulder and wrist problems – Modify for comfort or avoid.
- Low back problems – Modify for comfort or avoid.