



FASCIA THE MISSING PUZZLE PIECE

BY SARI LEWIS

Congratulations! You exercise on a regular basis and strive to stay fit. But those little aches and pains you feel seem not only to continue, but to move from place to place in your body, gnawing away at your overall feeling of wellness. What's going on?

Your fascia ("fá-shah") may be partly to blame. Fascia is the three-dimensional connective web that surrounds all of the tissues in your body from head to toe without interruption. It helps the body retain its shape by enhancing stability and flexibility. When illness or injury occurs, however, the fascia can become tight and restrict the body's natural function and range of motion.

If fascia loses its gelatinous property, any movement can propagate unbalanced movement throughout the body, creating painful muscle spasms and fascial alterations. Because the entire fascial network is interconnected, pain can shift from one spot to another. A fascial restriction in one region can amplify tension of fascia in another area—like pulling a snag in a finely-knit sweater. Trigger points in fascia can restrict joint and muscle movements thereby creating premature fatigue, chronic pain, injury, and reduced motor skills efficiency.

With an exceptionally mild stretch and light pressure, you can

release fascial tension and relieve your discomfort. Although muscle tissue responds to a relatively firm stretch, fascial tissue is very tough and highly resistant to stretch. Slow, sustained movements help increase mobility, decrease discomfort, and prevent injury.

Foam rollers are an excellent and inexpensive way to release tension in your fascia and other tissues. Here are some helpful tips for adding the foam roller to your current routine:

- Spend 60-90 seconds per self-release technique
- Stretch both the affected and unaffected side (i.e. both IT bands)
- When you find a particularly tender point, try to hold or gently rock the pressure for an additional 60-90 seconds
- Maintain a strong core through tightening abdominal muscles for stability
- Breathe slowly and evenly to allow optimal release
- Remember, a slow, sustained release will yield a better response of the fascia
- If symptoms persist that interfere with your workouts or daily activities, a few visits with a skilled therapist may be helpful.

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