

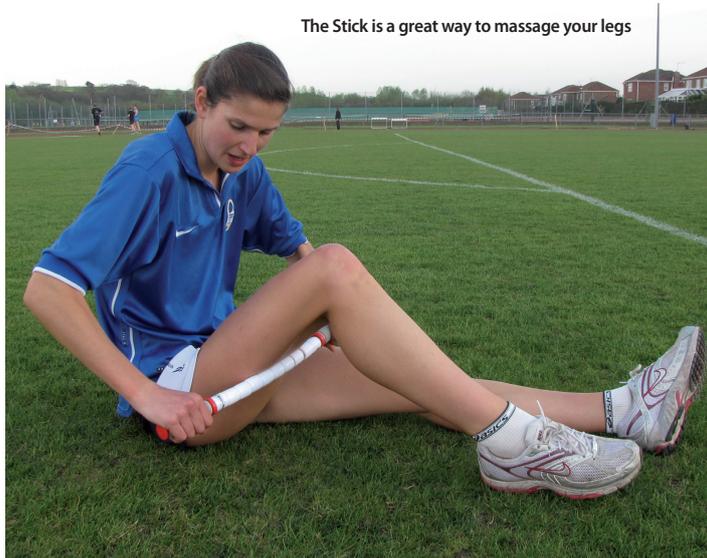
Self massage with foam rollers is now commonplace among athletes but there is also a portable stick that can do the job, writes DAVID LOWES

FOAM rollers for myofascial release are an invaluable tool for athletes and can be used before and after exercise to get rid of those knots in muscles known as trigger points (AW, February 25). The only downside to them is that they take up a lot of space in your suitcase when traveling and also many females have difficulty doing the calf stretch due to the strength needed in the shoulders and arms to facilitate the exercise. The alternative is 'The Stick' which is an American invention which has been produced since 1991 and does the same job and can be used individually or by another person for the more inaccessible areas and importantly is easily transportable.

So what is it? It is basically a stick with two bicycle type handles at each end with plastic spindles that rotate around a fixed rod when massaging a selected area and has been termed 'a toothbrush for muscles!' It can be used for most areas of the body independently and it is up to the individual to decide how much pressure to exert. Unlike the foam roller which necessitates the athlete to use their own bodyweight to have an effect, The Stick relies on pressure from the individual or another person. Of course, it can be a matter of trial and error at first and it is better to roll

Getting some stick

The Stick is a great way to massage your legs



the muscles gently before deciding if deeper and heavier pressure is required. The manufacturers claim that it increases flexibility, accelerates recovery, reduces muscle soreness and stiffness, prepares muscle for activity, flushes muscles from the rigours of activity and even improves strength.

The muscles can be rolled out through light clothing such as tracksuits and leggings and all the usual areas can be massaged such as the calves, hamstrings, quadriceps, iliotibial bands, gluteals as well as arms, neck (avoiding spine), shoulders, mid and lower back and hips. The Stick is waterproof and is designed to bend without breaking and it is highlighted that it is not necessary to hurt a muscle to have the best effect.

It works by rolling out knots in muscles, providing myofascial release and trigger point therapy and this

warms muscles, increases circulation and encourages a nutrient-rich bloodflow which relieves pain and increases range of motion, promotes flexibility and speeds recovery.

■ One for every day of the week

THERE are seven different types of stick for every individual need including:

The Stick Original Body Stick 24in which allows self massage to almost any part of the body (£39.99). The Sprinter Stick 19in is a shorter version and therefore more portable which is great for use on the legs but not so easy for the upper body (£34.99).

The Marathon Stick 20in is softer than the other sticks and is designed for those with very small muscle mass or those who like very gentle massages (£31.99). The Travel Stick 17in is the shortest version and therefore the

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most portable and can be carried in a rucksack. Good for use on legs, but less easy for the upper body (£27.99).

The Stiff Stick 24in is for those that like a really deep massage and the increased core diameter penetrates larger tight muscles with ease (£45.99). The Power Stick 27in is a long massage stick with 16 spindles and is recommended for larger people (£47.99). The Big Stick 30in is the longest and stiffest stick manufactured with 18 spindles and is a favourite with weight lifters and body builders.

To complement these is The FootWheel which was developed to soothe tired, achy feet by massage in seconds. By simply rolling back and forth under the foot it gives an excellent foot massage and with the wonder of myofascial release makes it a must in the management of plantar fasciitis (£19.99).

■ How to use it

TO use The Stick a typical warm-up for healthy muscle tissue involves about 20 progressively deeper passes over each muscle group for about 30 seconds per area. Some discomfort will be experienced when the spindles locate a trigger point in the muscle and these are areas that are often weak, stiff and sore, frequently tight and therefore susceptible to injury.

These areas need 20 additional passes over the trigger point and may require extra rolling several times a day. As with all areas of discomfort, it is best to ease back on training and even rest until it has gone and continued soreness should involve seeking some professional therapeutic help.

■ TO buy The Stick go to www.the-stick.co.uk or www.achillesheel.co.uk or call 0141-342 5722



Due to its design, The Stick can be used in many ways



Variety: seven different types of The Stick exist