

Have a ball!

Body rolling works for everyone

Heather Conn

Body rolling is taking off in North America.

Using balls of varying sizes (15 to 25 centimetres), body rollers apply pressure on the body to release muscle tension, stimulate tendons, increase circulation, and transform body structure and alignment.

Body rolling improves the body's physical restrictions and restores smooth energy flow. The practice, which anyone can do, follows specific routines based on the logical sequence of how the body's neuromuscular system meshes together. For example, muscles relax from their point of origin to where they insert into bone.

In other words, you don't just lie on a ball and roll around on it. Rather, you place the ball where a muscle's

tendon connects to bone, such as at the spine, and then apply your body weight to the ball. In small, incremental steps, you roll the ball along a concentrated body area to the insertion point of the muscle. This enables the tendon to become more elastic and release tension from where it attaches at the bone, which initiates a release through the whole muscle. This is similar to massage therapy, which stretches and loosens constricted areas.

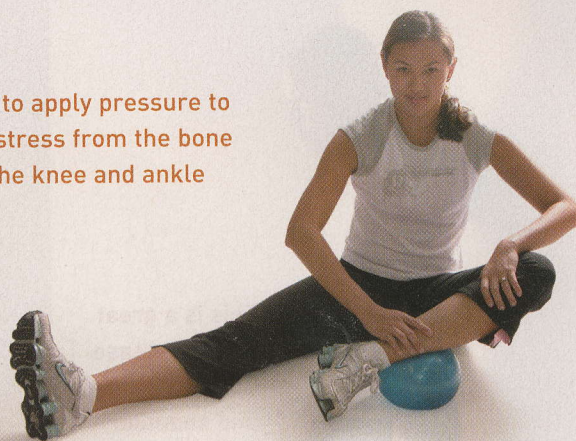
The result? Body rollers can pinpoint physical knots and tissue tightness and gently release both the accumulated pain and soreness. Regardless of your fitness level, you can gain a deeper awareness of how your body reacts to stress or overcompensates for injury. Yamuna Zake, the New York-based instructor who created body rolling as a therapeutic self-care practice, calls this process of responding to the sensations in one's body "touch and tell" anatomy.

“This is about letting go, to be fit,” she says. “People usually push too hard and strain themselves to get fit. Body rolling is a different concept. People need to understand that everybody can be better in their body, and it’s not that hard.”

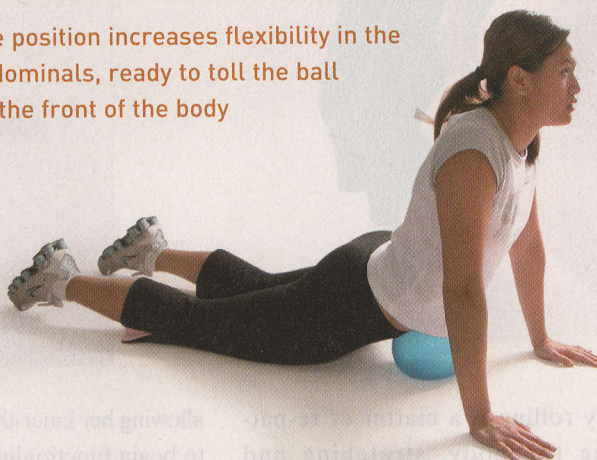
This new fitness movement has caught on with people of all physical abilities: including those injured or in a wheelchair, triathletes, Pilates instructors, yoga enthusiasts, and even couch potatoes. Zake insists that, “After sitting all day at work, one half-hour of body rolling is more beneficial than a heavy session at the gym for relieving stress and tension, discomfort, or pain.”

A former yoga instructor, Zake has taught body rolling for seven years across North America. She has seen success stories from greater muscle tone and decreased cellulite, to healing of chronic sciatica and the end of long-term pain from a herniated disk.

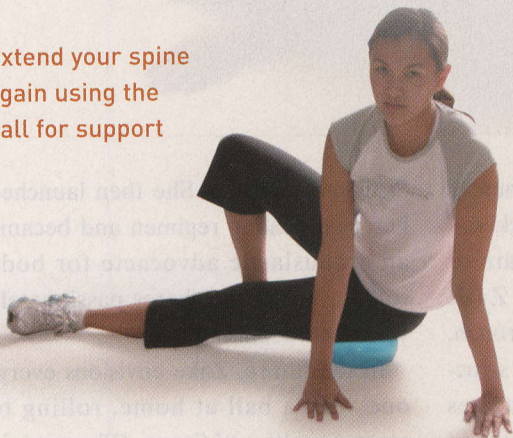
It’s easy to apply pressure to release stress from the bone toward the knee and ankle



The position increases flexibility in the abdominals, ready to roll the ball up the front of the body



Extend your spine again using the ball for support

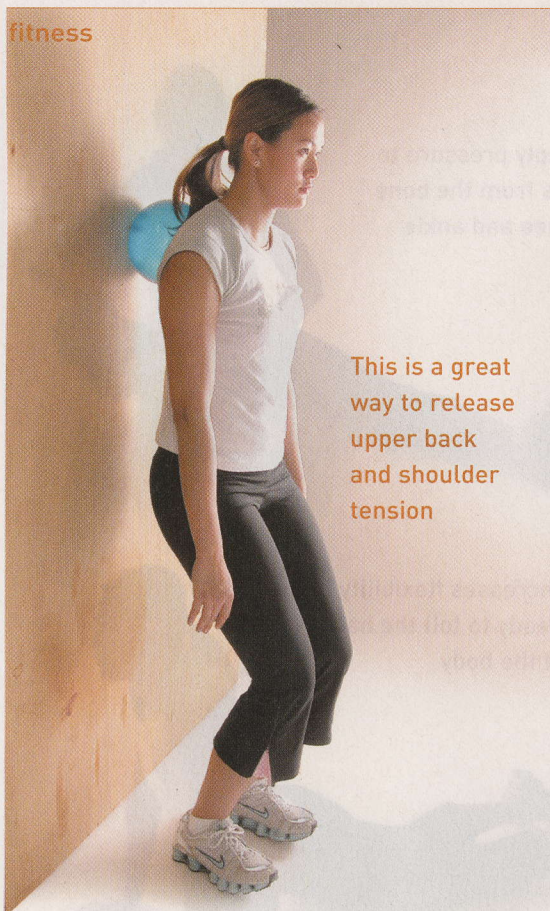


“People have miraculous results,” says Taylore Carre, a Vancouver-based certified body rolling instructor who has practised for six years. “It’s instant gratification. I had a man in my class who’s been a triathlete for 20 years. After one session, he said it was the first time in 15 years that he has had no lower back pain.”

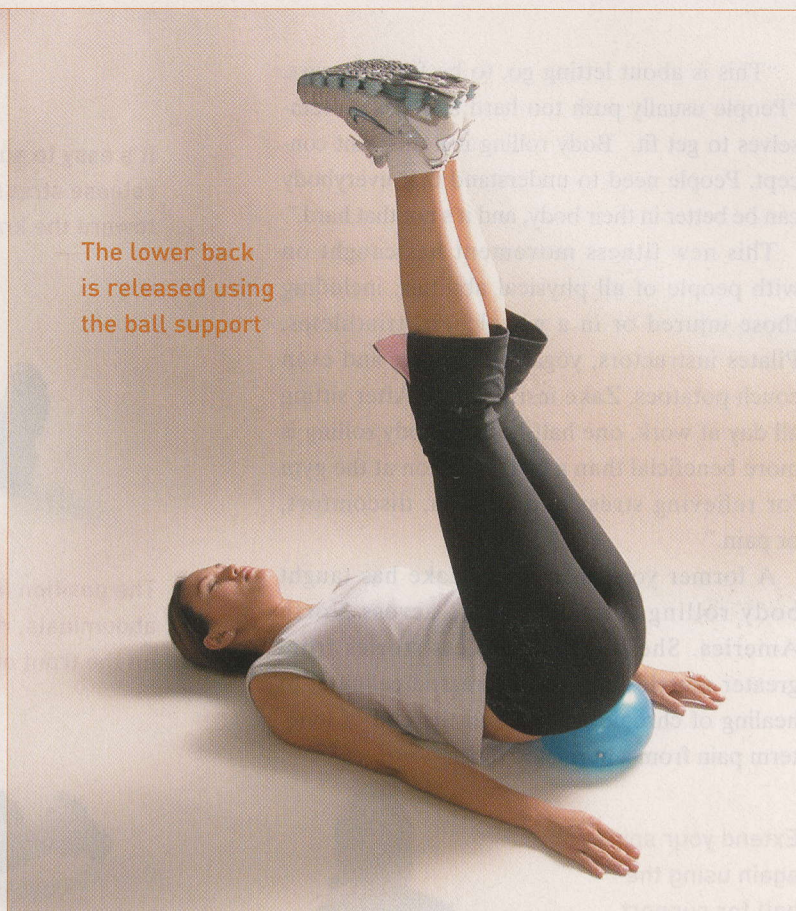
Use the ball to support and extend your spine



“Body rolling is a matter of repatterning the body, stretching, and retraining muscles to unwind and elongate—go long and lean—not tight and compressed.”



This is a great way to release upper back and shoulder tension



The lower back is released using the ball support

Body rolling is a matter of re-patterning the body, stretching and retraining muscles to unwind and elongate—"go long and lean"—not tight and compressed. This helps prevent injury for people who work out vigorously. In Zake's words, "The key to re-patterning is to see the muscles as a connecting chain and to release all of them, from hip to knee to foot."

Zake developed Body rolling with knowledge of hands-on realignment, a system that treats structural problems in the body, an interest in yoga practice, a thorough knowledge of anatomy, and her own physical predicament. After she gave birth to her daughter in 1979, her left hip gave way. She tried two months of orthopedics, chiropractic, acupuncture and other healing systems but nothing stabilized her hip and femur. So, she decided to apply what she knew to her own body and used a ball to release her tight muscles,

allowing her inner-thigh adductor muscles to begin functioning again. It worked.

For athletes impatient to train or improve their performance, Zake offers a "first things first" approach. She evaluates their whole body structure, corrects posture, and educates them about their body's rebalance needs. "People don't have to work so hard to feel better," she insists.

Body rolling requires a willingness to confront the pain in one's body and view it in the context of one's whole physical makeup. "Most people are afraid of pain in their neck, pelvis or shoulders," says Carre. "With this work, we end up using pain as a guide. We learn how to heal it instead of fearing it."

Carre's own physical pain, the result of multiple car accidents and extensive surgery, led her to read *Body Rolling* (Yamuna Zake, Healing Arts Press, 1997), co-authored with medical writer

Stephanie Golden. She then launched her own healing regimen and became an enthusiastic advocate for body rolling, which she shares passionately with her students.

In the future, Zake envisions everyone with a ball at home, rolling to greater health and fitness. Why not join the revolution? Have a ball! **F**

To find out more about body rolling, check out Zake's Web site or call 1-888-226-9616. You can reach Carre at 604-264-1500 or by e-mail: tcarre@shaw.ca. Watch for Zake's second book on body rolling, published by Random House, slated for release in September.

Heather Conn is a freelance writer/editor and photographer who writes about health, environment, lifestyle, and arts and culture for a variety of media.