

ROLLER MASSAGE: SURVEY OF PHYSICAL THERAPY PROFESSIONALS AND A COMMENTARY ON CLINICAL STANDARDS- PART II

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ABSTRACT

Background: Roller massage (RM) has become a popular intervention prescribed by physical therapy (PT) professionals. While this popularity has stimulated an increase in research and product development, the trends in the use of RM among PT professionals remain undocumented. It is unknown how professionals are using RM and integrating the research into their clinical practice.

Purpose: To survey and document responses in the knowledge, clinical application methods, and use of RM devices among PT professionals in the United States.

Design: Cross-sectional survey study

Methods: A 20-question online survey related to personal and professional demographics, beliefs about RM, preferred RM devices, RM exercise prescription, and client education was emailed to PT members of the Orthopedic and Sports Physical Therapy Sections.

Results: A total of 685 sports and orthopedic PT professionals completed the survey. Most professionals surveyed believe that RM decreases pain (80%), increases mobility (68%), and increases range of motion (ROM) (40%). Fifty-one percent believed moderate density rollers have the greatest effect. Eighty percent of professionals use a foam roller in their practice and 51% recommend to clients. A high proportion of professionals prescribe RM for injury treatment (82%) and for pre and post-exercise interventions (55%). Most professionals recommend rolling daily for 30 seconds to two minutes (55%), per muscle group (64%), at a self-paced cadence (47%). A high proportion of professionals use patient reported outcomes (80%), followed by joint ROM (59%), and movement-based testing (42%) to measure effects of RM. Eighty-seven percent of professionals use live instruction to educate clients and 91% believe there is a gap in the research.

Conclusion: The results of this survey should be considered descriptive and a starting point for future research to establish a consensus on optimal RM programming, devices, and application parameters for different musculoskeletal conditions. The observed responses provide some insight into how PT professionals are using RM in their practice and highlight the existing gap between the research and professional practice. Further research is needed to explore the responses documented in this study.

Key Words: Foam rolling, massage, muscle soreness, myofascial, perceived pain, self-recovery

Level of Evidence: 3

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.