

# 6 TACTICS TO REDUCE MUSCLE TENSION

When performed correctly, the following spiky ball exercises can provide symptomatic relief from trigger point muscle tension. The pain is usually more intense upon locating a new trigger point, so be gentle and move slowly. The longer you hold (30 seconds) the more the pain will diminish and you will feel the area release.

## QUADRATUS LUMBORUM (QL)



**ACTION** Stand with your back against the wall. Place the ball against the side of your lower back you want to work. Cross your arms in front of your chest and slide your body up and down the wall. When you find a tender spot lean and relax into the ball. You can also bend your trunk away from the wall to increase the intensity and add an extra stretch.

**BENEFITS** The Quadratus Lumborum (QL) is one of the most common places for a trigger point. With excessive amounts of sitting the QL can easily become dysfunctional as it tightens and shortens and becomes weak. Quite often this will mean the spinal discs in the lower back are taking extra load, further increasing the risk of a lower back injury.

## CHEST



**ACTION** Lay face down on the floor with the spiky ball under your chest. Roll around on the ball to locate the trigger points and tight spots. You should find the most tender spot around the pectoral insertion (near your shoulder). You can do this up against a wall, however, lying flat on the ground will allow you to increase the pressure being exerted onto the ball.

**BENEFITS** Tight chest muscles can pull the shoulders forward, resulting in head forward postures and rounded shoulders. By releasing tightness in this area, the shoulders can sit back naturally, allowing more oxygen to come into the lungs and allowing the arms to swing freely. This counter action of opening the chest can also allow for better thoracic spine mobility.

## UPPER BACK (TRAPEZIUS)



**ACTION** Place the spiky ball between the wall and upper part of your trapezius. Turn your body away from the wall. Roll onto the ball until you find the tender spots. Give yourself a hug and pull the arm on the side that you are working on across your body with your other arm. Repeat on other side.

**BENEFITS** Overactive and tight trapezius muscles are one of the most common causes of neck pain and stiffness. Tightness in the 'traps' may also result in an increased risk of injury to the shoulder and neck. Releasing pressure from your trapezius muscles regularly in this way may also relieve tension headaches.

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## THE FEET



**ACTION** Start by standing or sitting on a chair with the ball under your foot. Relax your toes and roll throughout the arch of your foot, through the joints of the toes, including the big toe and little toe joints. Roll around the heel and the inside and outside of the foot. Place the ball onto one area and press down gently and firmly. Repeat this on the other foot. Spend a good 30-60 seconds on each foot.

**BENEFITS** The foot doesn't have any specific trigger points but applying pressure to the foot with a spiky ball is a great way to loosen up the fascia and increase mobility. This is a nice exercise to do first thing in the morning or when you get home from work to relieve aching arches and sore feet. Trigger points in the soleus muscles of the calves are the primary cause of heel pain, so make sure you don't skip this area.

## ROTATOR CUFF



**ACTION** To find the trigger points in the rotator cuff muscles lie flat on your back. Place the ball behind the shoulder on the lower and outer aspect of the shoulder blade. Raise your arm to a position straight in the air and down again, feeling the ball glide over this area. Scan for any areas of increased tension. Lean into any tender areas and maintain pressure on the ball for at least 15 seconds on each area.

**BENEFITS** If the external rotators of the shoulder are overstretched, pain tightness and pain at the front and back of the chest can occur. Trigger points in the deltoid and shoulders will also result in weak shortened muscles and limit range of motion and shoulder flexibility.

## GLUTES (PIRIFORMIS)



**ACTION** The easiest way to find the piriformis trigger point is to sit on the spiky ball with your knees bent until you locate the trigger point. It is important not to tense up but to try to relax onto the ball. Sink into the sore spots until the tension eases, and then move onto a slightly different spot. If it is too painful or there is too much stretch in the hip rotators keep your legs straight. You may get a referred pain down your leg upon applying pressure to this trigger point. This is completely normal and will assist the release.

**BENEFITS** The piriformis is a small, deep hip rotator muscle that seems to cause many people significant pain and discomfort. This muscle can become tight and short when the larger gluteal muscles become weak or inactive. Because the piriformis is very close to the sciatic nerve, it can also create numbness, weakness, or a radiating nerve pain down one or both legs.