

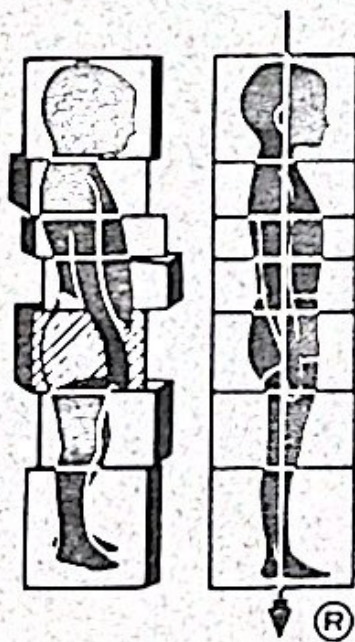
Rolfing®

The Basic Ten Series

By Jason Mixer, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

Originally developed by Ida P. Rolf, Ph.D., Rolfing is a system of connective tissue manipulation and body education, which is focused on structural alignment and balanced movement. In 1971, Dr. Rolf founded the Rolf Institute® of Structural Integration, creating a tradition of quality instruction and ethical practice that is continued throughout the world.

Fundamentally, Rolfing is based on some simple ideas about human structure: (1) most human beings are significantly out of alignment with gravity; (2) we function better when we are lined up with the gravitational field of the earth; and (3) the human body is so plastic that its alignment can be brought into harmony with gravity at practically any time of life.



Ida Rolf's Discoveries

Ida Rolf earned a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Columbia University in 1916. During her scientific research, she made a fundamental discovery about the body: the same network of connective tissue which contains and links the muscle system when it's healthy can be used to reshape it when it's been pulled out of proper order. Every muscle and organ in the body is enveloped in connective tissue called fascia. This interconnected system creates a vast three-dimensional web, which provides critical support and protection for the entire body.

In fact, this strong, flexible tissue we call fascia might also be called the prima material - the basic material of the body. In the developing embryo, part of the connective tissue evolves into bone; while muscle develops as tissue tendrils growing out through the fascial network. Toward the end of each muscle, the fascia thickens into straps we call tendons and ligaments, which work to bind muscle to bone and bone to bone.

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Dr. Rolf's discovery of the importance of the fascial system revolutionized the thinking about the body. While the enwrapping fascia supports the muscles and holds muscle and bone combinations in place, it also has one troublesome property: it can support whatever patterns of movement and posture the body adopts. Just as the fascial system can aid balanced posture and movement patterns, it can compensate for constant strain and other deviations by shortening and tightening. In this way, the body actually changes its shape to reflect how it's being used. Fortunately, the fascial web can be restored to health. The Certified Rolfer™ analyzes body patterns, and through refined and intelligent pressure softens and lengthens the fascia, allowing the body to right itself.

Dr. Rolf's discovery of the importance of fascia was based upon another insight. She recognized that gravity is the fundamental influence on the body. Throughout our lives we balance our bodies within the pull of gravity. Because of this, any change to one part of the body is spread throughout the entire body. If the natural balance of the body is disturbed, if it doesn't follow the best

geometry of the skeleton, the whole body will gradually change form to adapt to the deviation.

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For example, a child falls from a bicycle and injures a knee. To avoid pain, he or she tightens the muscles around that knee. Since the body works within the force of gravity, the entire muscle and fascial system gradually shifts to compensate for the first change. Movement through the pelvis is influenced, as is the pattern of breathing and the set of the head. Because muscles alone cannot carry the additional tension, the fascia shortens to support the new movement, and in time, the shape and function of the whole body alters with them.

The human body is like a house. It's structured so that each part has its proper place, and each piece interlocks to balance the load of the others. As in the well structured home with every post and beam in place, the well structured body is also balanced securely. Because gravity acts on everything, parts of the body that are not in alignment are like beams unsupported by a post; they are pulled into painfully unnatural positions. What the Rolfer seeks is a return of the construction to its original blueprint specifications. Putting one piece back into place is usually not enough. Every part of the structure needs to be fully integrated before a house can stand or a body can work efficiently. This kind of arrangement, in turn, produces what Dr. Rolf called "The gospel of Rolfing: when the body is working properly, the force of gravity can flow through it. Then, spontaneously, the body heals itself."

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The Body's Geometry

Dr. Rolf's view of the role of the fascia in posture led to still another major discovery. It might be called the theory of Body Geometry. When an elbow, knee or any other joint is properly balanced and integrated into the whole, the individual experiences an internal

sense of rightness and equilibrium. The body senses that it is aligned along the true planes of movement. The hinges of the legs – the hips, knees, ankles and toes – all work within a single plane. The paths of the legs have parallel courses. The head and spine have a clear sense of “up”. The elbows move naturally in a smooth course. Compared with this new organization, the previous functioning of the body appears random, even chaotic.

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In contrast, this new geometry - this new orientation in space - feels much more secure. The goal of the Rolfer is to bring the body closer to its center line of gravity so that fewer muscles are required for basic standing and sitting. Posture is no longer an immobile holding action but a floating balance and ease. It is this attention to the proper body geometry that distinguishes Rolfing from those forms of bodywork that simply work as deep tissue massage and relaxation. Naturally, each person has his or her own version of this ideal geometry, which depends on the person's height, the length of his or her limbs, and other similar factors.

Rolfers consider five basic points when planning individual goals for a client. In order for the human body to function properly and maintain an upright position, these five landmarks must be in alignment: the ear, the shoulder, the hip, the knee and ankle. The head, neck and shoulders tell the story of the structure below them. The body should glide along, rather than look as if it has to do extremely hard work with every step. The head and neck must be centered over the middle of the body, and the spine that supports the structure must be at the back of the pelvic section. The spine must then curve in conjunction with the natural back curvature until it enters the base of the skull in a central direction. Any damage or constant pressure will disturb the balance of the upper torso.

To illustrate these ideas, let's follow a mock client, “Marcia” through an initial session. Please note that each client and each situation is unique; this is simply one example.

A Visit to a Rolfer

Marcia had known about Rolfig for maybe ten years. She knew that the technique was developed by a biochemist and that it was designed to improve posture and flexibility. She had also heard that it was sometimes painful, although people she knew who had received Rolfig did not emphasize this aspect as much as people who had not. She decided to try it.

After answering a health questionnaire and discussing her goals and concerns with her Rolfer, Marcia undressed to her underwear and had some before-session-one photos taken. Then she was introduced to her body through a Rolfer's eyes. She began to see that her body was far from organized: not only were her shoulders at different heights, but they were also rotated distinctly to the right, while her pelvis was turned to the left. She noticed that she could breathe either from her upper chest or from her abdomen, but not both. From the side, she saw that her midsection protruded out in front because her upper back slumped ahead of her pelvis and abdomen. Following her shoulders, her neck and head also came forward. The Rolfer helped her to see that if her head were balanced properly on her spine, the muscles in her back would not have to support its weight.

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Her breathing was deeper and with less effort.*

Finally, she was asked to lie down on the cushioned table, and the Rolfer began to work on her ribs. She felt a brief burning sensation as he did, as if the skin was being stretched and kneaded. He worked around her left armpit and asked her to perform an arm movement as he did. The discomfort was different here – sharper, more precise. His hands seemed to know just where to find tightness and tension. First in front, then along her side, back under her shoulder blade, down under the line of her rib cage. Soon she was feeling lighter, as if her body had more room. Her breathing was deeper and with less effort. Her left arm was moving easily, almost by itself. But when she moved the right one, it seemed blocked. She had never noticed a problem there before, but the difference between her arms was very noticeable. As the session continued, Marcia felt more at ease. The Rolfer worked on her hips and then on the back of her thighs. He explained that years in high

heels had caused her knees to hyperextend, or lock, backward. This had cut off circulation in her lower legs and left her with a tendency toward cold feet.

He also connected the locked knees to the forward jut of her upper body. As he continued to work, she felt the same burning sensation on the backs of her thighs for a moment, but it was soon replaced with a new sensation of length and freedom. When she stood up, she felt straighter, even though she had not previously thought her posture was especially crooked. As she walked around the room, her legs seemed to glide under her; her knees did not lock as before. Looking in the mirror, she saw that although her upper back was still pulling back, it did look and feel better. Her body felt alive and tingling. The Rolfer gave her a mental image to think about: her motion could come from deep inside her body. She felt more expansive, taller. When she sat, she sat straighter and liked it. When she slouched, the position was uncomfortable!

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You Can Feel the Difference Between Holding and Supporting

One of the major distinctions made by Rolfers is the difference between holding and supporting. As children, most of us are told to "sit up straight". The well meaning relatives who usually make this command are trying to teach us good posture, and by good posture they generally mean some variation of "chest out and shoulders back!" Try this posture right now as you read. Notice that when your shoulders are pulled back, they cannot be supported by the rib cage, that instead, your trunk is lifted up off the pelvis and held in an uncomfortable imitation of good posture. While sitting, most of us sink forward and let our bodies hang off our spines in various forms of collapse. When we do remember to "sit up straight," we often reverse everything and hold our chests up and keep the shoulders high and aloft. Some people even become locked in this position. Although they may look good, most trained observers agree that the body structure is not supported from below in this posture; it is uncomfortably held from above. In either case, collapsed posture or held posture, the body expends energy inefficiently, creating an uncomfortable imbalance.

To see how much better efficient posture can make you feel, first sit down. Then, let your chest fall so that your spine curves to the front. Now sit up so that your spine arches to the back. Do you feel relaxed, or is it an effort to hold your body in this second position? Return to the collapsed position, and put a hand on each hip bone. Push your hips forward until you feel the bottom of your pelvis - the two sit bones - touch the chair seat. As you do, notice that your chest floats up as the pelvis rolls forward. Now rest on the forward part of your sit bones. Notice that you can sit and maintain a feeling of support without either collapsing or holding your body up. Learned body patterns become so much a part of us that, at first, you may not be able to sit in this new, supported fashion for very long. You may also need to play with it until you can feel your body learning to support itself. But most people eventually find that they do not feel quite right unless they are using this supportive posture in place of the old holding patterns.

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What, Exactly, Is Rolfing?

Rolfing is typically taught or applied in a series of ten sessions, known as the Basic 10 series. Each session of the process is both a continuation of the previous one and an introduction to the next. The body is systematically and physically manipulated during this initial series of ten sessions, each of which lasts about 60 to 90 minutes and may be scheduled as often as twice a week. Some people choose to schedule their sessions once a week, others once a month. The cost of each session varies according to local economic conditions and the experience and education of the Rolfer. Rolfing is designed to uncover a structural ease and kinetic balance that is unique to each client. It is a process of education in which a Rolfer seeks to help a client discover the most efficient way of using his or her own body, given the limitations, liabilities and virtues of that body. In effect, the plan of each series of ten sessions is created anew for the needs of the individual person seeking help. However, there are certain guidelines and landmarks which every Rolfer follows in each series of sessions. We will explore these basic tenets as we continue our description of the treatment process.

The First Session

The intent of the first Roling session is considered superficial by most Rolfers, but they have a very special meaning for superficial. This session's goal is to systematically release the body's stocking - the fascial sheath that lies just below the skin's surface. Some lengthening of the trunk up and out of the pelvis is also anticipated, as well as a relaxation of the legs below the hip joint. Most people appear to be jammed into the pelvic structure from both above and below. After the initial session, clients usually feel taller and experience freer movement through the pelvis. The breathing pattern of the client is also affected in this session. Most of us employ only the upper rib cage when we breathe, ignoring the bottom of the rib cage and the diaphragm. By skillfully working with the superficial fascia as it spans the ribs, shoulder joint and costal arch, a Rolfer can help release a breathing pattern which uses the diaphragm and the front, sides and back of the rib cage to create one smooth, bellows like motion. As breathing becomes deeper and easier as the sessions go on, more oxygen is available for metabolic and catabolic activities, and the client feels an increase of energy.

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The end of the first session often involves some freeing of the fascial planes around the neck and shoulders, a lengthening of the structures on either side of the spine and those covering the lower back. Finally, the client is asked to walk and describe what changes he or she feels.

Reports of a lightness and ease, and a sensation of taking up more space are common. Some kind of homework is often assigned in order to reinforce the session's results. The Rolfer might suggest that the client imagine a string hanging from a helium-filled balloon and tugging on the top of his or her head as he or she walks. Or the client might be told to allow his or her breaths to press against the sides of the ribs and to both rise toward the head and drop to the navel.

The Second Session

The second Rolfing session centers around the legs and especially the feet. Most people carry their weight on the outside edge of each foot, even though the inside appears better able to support the stress of body weight. In addition, most people walk by allowing the legs to pull the upper body along after them. This habit puts too much pressure on the heels and can reduce flexibility in the toes and metatarsals. If, on the other hand, the upper body initiates a step by falling lightly forward, the legs can easily swing forward in response, with the body's weight balanced on the whole foot.

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After one leg has been worked on, clients are asked to walk and compare the action of the two legs. Invariably, they report that the leg which has received Rolfing feels stronger, more secure. Often they notice that the weight travels on the inside of that foot and that there seems to be less pressure on the heel. The other leg will then be worked on and some work will be done on the back and neck to balance the end of the session.

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The Third Session

The third Rolfing session is an integrating one. It ties the first two sessions together into a complex whole. It is the last of the superficial sessions and a crucial point for both Rolfer and client. Fundamentally, the third Rolfing session deals with what's called the lateral line from the head to the humerus, or upper arm, to the greater trochanter of the femur, or thigh bone. The client lies on his or her side as the Rolfing practitioner works to arrange the shoulder, ribs and pelvis into an even stack, differentiating the rib cage from the shoulder girdle on top and from the pelvis underneath. The Rolfer's goal is to set each in its own space without crowding from its neighbors. The result will eventually be freer breathing and less

painful crowding of the structures. Typical homework after the third session might be to imagine that the pelvis is hanging from the rib cage like a swing hanging from a tree limb.

The Fourth Session

The fourth Roling session represents a change in the Rolfer's intention and commitment. His or her focus is no longer on the superficial fascial planes and is now concentrated upon what's called the body's active core. Rolfers define core structures as those that lie close to the spine and body's midline; they are differentiated from the sleeve, the shoulder and pelvic girdles, and the lateral structures of the legs. The agenda for the fourth session is deceptively simple. The inside of the legs, from the ankles to the pelvic floor, is treated, followed by work on the hamstring muscles and organization of the back and neck. The goal of the session is to establish improved support for the structures that make up the pelvic floor. Although most of the work is on the legs, a client will also often feel a lift throughout the torso. The fourth Roling session establishes an inner pillar from which the limbs can be hung. That is, the Rolfer seeks to hang the body's sleeve from the supportive core.

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The Fifth Session

The fifth Roling session is a continuation of the fourth. It is recommended that not more than two or three weeks separate these sessions. Its province is the relationship of the superficial abdominal muscle, the rectus abdominis, to the deep-seated hip flexor, the iliopsoas. Most people mistakenly use the wide band of external stomach muscles to do the work of stronger, deeper lying muscles. During this session the Rolfer slowly lengthens and separates the outer structures to allow room for the inner structures to reassert their strength.

Sometimes clients become anxious about this particular session, especially when they know a bit about anatomy. They fear manipulation deep in the body and in the area of crucial organs. However, Dr. Rolf developed an ingenious and remarkably safe

method of manipulating these deep structures with a minimum of discomfort and this technique is taught to all Certified Rolfers. The deep stomach muscles have certain properties that make them unique in the body. They are the only muscles that extend from the legs to the trunk. All other muscles of the leg or trunk attach directly to some part of the pelvic girdle. As a result, the proper training and toning of these leg and stomach muscles are usually better for problem backs than traditional sit-ups. In fact, sit-ups are likely to exaggerate back problems by shortening the front of the body from the collarbone to hip joint. But the balancing exercises of Rolfing and Rolf Movement work are designed to bring health and vitality to the under-used deep structures, and they can do much more than the surface muscles to cure weak backs.

During the fifth session, the Rolfer slowly lengthens and separates the outer structures to allow room for the inner structures to assert their strength

A healthy, active psoas muscle also helps other conditions. The nerve fibers located near the psoas become stimulated as the muscles respond to new movement. Menstrual cramping, constipation and excessive gas are often lessened as a result. A satisfying feeling of the leg-trunk connection of these muscles often emerges as the client learns to move his or her legs from the lumbar spine rather than from the hip joint. The holistic nature of the body becomes physical reality rather than an intellectual idea. The pelvic tilt is sometimes taught during this session to give the client a way to practice moving with the psoas at home.

The Sixth Session

In the Rolfing series, each session focuses on some aspect of the pelvis. Even in the second session, work on the legs and feet is designed to establish support for the pelvic basin. However, the sixth session is very specific in its approach to the pelvis. The muscle structures that are the keys here are the deep rotating muscles under the buttocks. If the client's legs are unable to function smoothly while walking, balancing the rotators deep in the buttocks will usually even out pacing and gait.

By this time in the sequence, both the Rolfer and his client have become aware of the balancing of the pelvic structure. As the body

becomes more symmetrical and organized around a vertical line, disparities between the right and left sides become less apparent. In the sixth session, this symmetry is enhanced and extended above and below the pelvic girdle.

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The incorrect use of the term posture to describe the results of Rolfing can now be better understood. The Latin root of posture is *positus*, meaning "to place, to put". Consequently, good posture usually implies the placing of the body into a position that is considered appropriate and balanced. The goal of the sixth session, on the other hand, is to create a structure which rests on a well-supported vertical core and demands a minimum of effort to maintain. Rolfing, therefore, is concerned with the integration of human structures and not with outdated notions about posture.

The results of the sixth Rolfing session are generally dramatic and welcomed by clients. A sense of balance and space are reported. There is an ability to breathe through to the spine; that is, the spine appears to undulate slightly during respiration in a gentle, wavelike motion. People who have decreased or eliminated chronic back pain through Rolfing usually point to the sixth session as pivotal in their progress. Others, who come suffering from anxiety, may also describe a great easing of emotional distress after this session.

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The Seventh Session

Referring to the seventh Rolfing session, Dr. Rolf often remarked: "The seventh session is the last chance to 'horizontal' the pelvis". In doing that, the work of the seventh session is directed entirely toward balancing the neck and head on the spine. During a seventh session, the Rolfer works on the fascia of the neck, opens the connective tissues around the skull and face and helps to improve breathing further by opening constricted nasal passages.

The Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Sessions

In each of the first seven sessions of Rolfing, the practitioner focused on one area of the body. The goals of a particular session centered around securing its particular part in the vertical balance of the whole body. With the eighth session, a broader and more comprehensive approach to the integration of the entire body structure becomes necessary. These last three sessions are often called the integrative hours, and in them the client completes the Rolfing basic 10 series.

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The dictionary defines integration as “a combination and coordination of separate and diverse elements or units into a more complete and harmonious whole”. This is the job of the client and Rolfer in these final sessions. “It is easy to take a body apart,” Dr. Rolf would declare, “but it takes skill and understanding to put it back together”. In the last three Rolfing sessions, the practitioner and client are working towards a body that is posed on a narrow base and can move easily in any direction. Large fascial sheaths are related one to the other, and a silky quality in the muscle tissue is sought. Several times during these sessions, the client will be asked to stand up and walk about in order to assess the result of the manipulations. Much work will be done with the client sitting or standing, because the relationship of a particular body part to gravity is the most important goal of these hours.

Rolf Movement Integration and Advanced Rolfing

After the completion of the basic 10 series, it is suggested that clients avoid additional deep structural work for three to six months or more because the changes that are initiated by the first sessions will continue for months, even years.

During this time, many clients see Rolf Movement practitioners who are trained to teach them ways of using their bodies to maximum benefit. Clients are encouraged to look to the intelligence within the body for efficient, balanced patterns of

movement within the scope of gravity. Rolf Movement Integration is taught as a sequence of sessions each devoted to specific structural and movement themes. While often utilized by clients who have completed the basic 10 series, Rolf Movement Integration serves equally well as a stand-alone tool for achieving higher levels of self-awareness and body coherence.

"...what joy I felt walking on the beach afterward. The pure and simple joy of being ecstatic in my body!"

Six months to a year after completing an initial series, many clients may need or desire a refresher session, or tune-up. Many Rolfers recommend one or two sessions per year after the initial basic 10 series to maintain the benefits. But it is possible to have too much Rolfing, and most practitioners recommend that clients use what they've already learned rather than seek additional material. Sometime after an initial series, many clients return for the shorter, four to six session Advanced Series. This sequence concentrates on ways of balanced patterning in gravity, using the organization established in the original ten sessions. Often areas that were painful and frozen during the first sessions are found to be pliable and free during advanced work. As one client described her advanced sessions: "On going back... there was so little pain in my body, I accused my Rolfer of getting soft. ... what joy I felt walking on the beach afterward. The pure and simple joy of being ecstatic in my body!"

Training and Certification

The Rolf Institute is accredited through the Commission On Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA). To obtain Certified Rolfer™ status, students complete thorough training at the Rolf Institute headquarters or its international offices. Requirements include a minimum of 600 to 731 hours of classroom education, depending on prior training, as well as extensive practical experience.

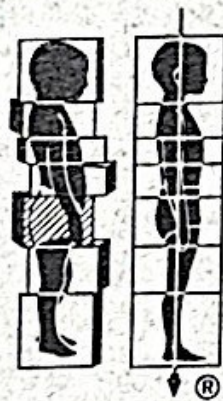
Certified Advanced Rolfers™ and Rolf Movement Practitioners™ have completed additional education and practical experience. For a detailed explanation of the training requirements, including admissions information, please visit our website at www.rolf.org.

For additional information on all aspects of Rolfing, including a list of Certified Rolfers, please contact us:

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