

The Power of Rolfing (SI)

What Rolfing Structural Integration
Can Do for You

Owen Marcus

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The Secrets of the Science and Art of Rolfing® SI

Introduction

The goal of this e-book is to give you a quick and simple guide to Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI), what it might do for you, and how it works. Or for those who want a friend or family member to experience the benefits of Rolfing® (SI).

Much of the content in this e-book was adapted from articles I wrote for several publications as part of the Sandpoint Wellness Council (in Sandpoint, ID). As a reader of this book, you are one of the many people looking for new solutions to your problems. As local healthcare providers, we formed the Wellness Council to give people the knowledge they need to make new choices and find those solutions.

For more than 60 years, people have continued to seek out Rolfing® SI to fix or enhance what other therapies can't. After 30 plus years of practice and more than one thousand clients, I have not only learned more about Rolfing® SI, but I have learned how to explain it and describe the unique benefits it offers people. This therapy with a strange name is actually easy to understand.

The first part of this book describes in clear terms the science and art of Rolfing® SI. The second part discusses many of the conditions that Rolfing® SI has successfully helped to treat. The last part of the book explains the effects Rolfing® SI has on clients.

Please use this book as a guide to explore what Rolfing® SI may do for you or your friends, and share it with others.

For more information on Rolfing® SI, to locate a qualified Certified Rolfer™, to learn how to become a Certified Rolfer™, and for the latest research on Rolfing® SI and fascia (fascia is the connective tissue Certified Rolfers™ release), visit the website of the Rolf institute: www.rolf.org.

Overview of Rolfing® SI

I am the first to admit that naming a technique Rolfing was not the best marketing move. Ida Rolf, Ph.D., the founder, would have agreed. It wasn't her choice...the name just stuck.

If you are like most people, you have heard a few things about Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI). You may have heard it hurts. Yes, there can be some pain, much like getting in shape or stretching can be painful (more on this later). But Rolfing® SI still exists after 60 years and more than a million clients because it works. It is not a panacea, but if stress relief, soft tissue repair, or structure realignment are your issues or goals, Rolfing® may be the best thing for you.

The Four Reasons to Experience Rolfing® SI

Fix the Unfixable

Many of the clients who find their way to a Certified Rolfer's™ door do so because she or he has "tried everything." These people want to be well and have often invested tens of thousands of dollars to discover what is wrong and how to fix it. They might have tried surgery, medication, physical therapy, chiropractic...and yet the pain remains. After a multitude of tests, nothing shows up. Some are labeled hypochondriacs or are relegated to taking psychotropic drugs to treat their "emotional problems."

When medical tests don't find the cause of a problem, holistic health therapies can often go beyond finding the diagnosis to helping the client heal it. Rolfing® SI is particularly good at treating chronic soft tissue problems, such as tight muscles and stress-related issues like hypertension. As we get older we accumulate more tension in our bodies. This stress and tension ends up in the fascia¹ (the connective tissue of our body that holds everything together).

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fascia>

There is no medical test for the relative buildup of fascial tension. There is no drug or physical therapy to release that stress. Over time, this tension pulls on your bones, your joints, and your internal organs. Rolfers™ abilities to identify and then release chronic and acute tension set us apart from other professions. When I had my clinic in Scottsdale, AZ, physicians would send me patients to determine why the standard therapies weren't working. Often it was because the real cause of the problem was not actually located anywhere near where the symptom had presented itself. Particularly with chronic problems, the fascial network will tighten in one area only to manifest a problem in another.

For most patients, until the chronic tension is released, no lasting improvement is possible. One of the goals of Rolfing® is to release the chronic tension of the body, freeing the body to heal itself.

Improve Performance

A tight body is not only more prone to injury and pain; its performance is limited. It is as if you're attempting to move in a jumpsuit that is too small. Part of the problem is that the jumpsuit gradually shrinks over many years causing you to lose awareness of its effect on your performance. All of this is compounded by dysfunction caused by past injuries, compensatory patterns, and the fact that your shrinking jumpsuit creates imbalances across joints (some areas becoming too long or lax).

As Certified Rolfers™ we began speaking about core muscles back in the 1960s, and people thought we were nuts. Now with the growth of Pilates and yoga, core strength is a hot topic, and rightfully so. When your movement and power comes from those deep muscles you are less likely to injure yourself and more likely to perform better. Frequently people are so bound up that even with good instruction they are unable to fully access their core. Some will just end up making their core muscles tighter as they get stronger.

With Rolfing® SI, a client will not only release the chronic stress, they'll also be able to access their core muscles and learn to use gravity as their ally. True core usage and natural use of gravity go together. From

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my experience working with elite athletes, I learned that this relationship was frequently the difference between winning and losing.

Improve Quality of Life

Most clients come to Rolfing® SI to relieve pain. So why do they return when, after just a few sessions, the pain is often gone? They come back for the subtle benefits of feeling better. With their chronic stress and old traumas leaving, clients' bodies begin to feel young. What might have seemed like an emotional block just melts away with the release of tension in your body.

Learning to breathe naturally and relax is significant. These benefits may not be understood until the tension leaves. When the tight jumpsuit is removed, you are free.

The Best Investment

Numerous times over the years, I have heard clients say that the severe physical pain that drove them to Rolfing® SI was the best thing that could have happened to them. It was the pain that got them to try something as strange as Rolfing® SI, which gave them their body back.

We often behave like a frog in water that is slowly coming to a boil. The pain develops so gradually that we don't think to jump out until well past the point of comfort. Once out of the boiling water, we ask "Why did I wait so long?" Until we feel better, we don't know what we were missing. An investment in Rolfing® SI has the ability not only to remove the pain, but also to prevent future problems from developing. You'll never get caught in boiling water again!

After the series of Rolfing® SI sessions, clients will report that resolving their initial complaint wasn't the largest benefit; it was feeling alive again.

Common Benefits

Note: this is not a guarantee, but here are some examples to give you a sense of what is possible. Certified Rolfers™ frequently see these benefits in clients.

- Chronic stress and pain reduction
- Injury prevention and recovery
- Improved athletic performance
- Improved stamina
- Improved posture and gait
- Healthier appearance
- Healing of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Weight lost and cellulite reduction
- Enhanced circulation
- Improved digestive and organ function
- Chronic fatigue release and healing
- Fibromyalgia healing
- Healing and prevention of repetitive motion injuries
- Increased flexibility and coordination
- Chronic headaches disappearing
- Back pain healing
- TMJ pain elimination
- Emotional stress transforming into relaxation
- More vital energy
- Enhanced wellbeing
- Improved relaxation and sleep
- Greater enjoyment of the body

What Rolfing® SI Is Best at Treating?

If your problems or goals fall into any of these categories, Rolfing® SI may be beneficial for you.

Structure

What most will call posture, Certified Rolfers™ call structure. Posture is the behavioral consequence of structure. Your body's structural order will determine how you move.

To start with, most of what we were told was good posture—shoulders back, chest up, and stomach in—are more indicative of a stress response than good posture. Good posture is effortless. Many of the muscles we use to stand and move were not designed for those functions. When a muscle, or for that matter any body part, repeatedly does a job it is not designed to do, it produces stress and tension.

If you want to be straight and move with grace, find a Certified Rolfer™. By releasing the chronic tension, and with a little coaching, you can learn to significantly improve your appearance and movement.

Soft Tissue

Soft tissue is exactly what it sounds like: it is the muscles and the fascia—the connective tissue that contains all our body parts. Hans Selye, MD, published his book, *The Stress of Life* in 1956, calling fascia the organ of stress. When physical or emotional stress is not released, it is stored in the fascial network throughout the body, reproducing stress even when the stressor is gone. You feel it as soft tissue tightens up.

There is no drug or surgery that releases that type of tension. In holistic health treatments, there are several techniques, such as acupuncture and massage that do a great job of releasing more acute tension. Rolfing® SI excels at releasing chronic tension from decades of stress, misuse, and injuries.

Certified Rolfers™ will frequently hear clients say, “I know I would feel better if someone would just loosen me up.” Rolwing® SI attempts not only to release the chronic tension, but also prevent it from returning by organizing the body.

Stress

Your fight or flight response (sympathetic nervous system response) is meant to kick in only when you are in danger. Unfortunately, because of the stress in your life, and how you learned to deal with that stress, you may never escape this survival response. Problems arise when you live in a constant state of survival response; the ongoing effect of the response accumulates. The persistent stress response is, in part, perpetuated by tense fascia, which keeps the stress response activated. It is as if your accelerator is stuck, so that your engine revs even when you're in neutral. Just as the car engine will burn out, your body will become old before its time if it continually experiences such stress.

We are beginning to understand the physiology and effects of constant stress through research on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). With PTSD, the stressor might be gone, but the traumatic response continues. Many clients come to Rolwing® SI functioning from some point on the PTSD continuum, experiencing a stress response when there is no stressor.

There is research² showing that Rolwing® SI reduces a client's stress response. In layman's terms, that means you can *respond* calmly to stressors, rather than *react* physiologically. Your face doesn't have to flush. Your pulse doesn't need to race. You can simply acknowledge a stressor, and respond to it appropriately.

² <http://rolf.org/about/research.htm#rrr>

Where Is Rolfing® SI Best Used?

Rolfing® SI is best used to reduce or eliminate the cause of chronic pain. With the release of chronic tensions, the body can heal itself.

Rolfing® SI is not recommended for those with chronic illnesses involving systemic problems, genetic illnesses, or cancer. If the cause or the effect of the condition does not involve structure, soft tissue, or stress, Rolfing® SI's effectiveness significantly declines.

With some conditions, Rolfing SI® will not affect the disease, but can aid in recovery. Post-polio syndrome is an excellent example of how Rolfing® reverses years of strain from dealing with a disease.

Rolfing® SI's effectiveness in treating chronic conditions does make it effective in treating some acute conditions. Many other therapies, such as massage, chiropractic, and acupuncture, can also treat new problems effectively. It's not that Rolfing® SI can't help that new back tightness, but if that tightness is not built on a tight body, and is truly new and independent of past situations, Rolfing® SI may not be your only solution.

Massage therapy is most effective with acute problems. Physical therapy is best with rehabilitation from injuries and surgeries. Chiropractic treatments are best treating acute problems that cause joints to be out of alignment. A Certified Rolfer's™ focus is on chronic soft tissue problems affecting your structure and your stress response.

Bottom line, if your body needs to release persistent tension and subsequent problems, Rolfing® SI may be the most effective therapy.

How Does Rolfing® SI Work?

Rolfing® SI is a series of progressive, hour-long sessions. Each focuses on particular goals and areas of the body. These goals and areas vary with each client. The Certified Rolfer™ will address your immediate concern as he or she addresses the underlying causes and aligns your body to be in balance with gravity so that the results will have longevity.

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The client lies on a wide table in his or her bathing suit, underwear, or workout clothing. The Certified Rolfer™ uses his or her hands, forearms or elbows to release the soft tissue with the goal of bringing more order to the body. Through this sculpting process, the client can experience a deep release of chronic tension.

The Certified Rolfer™ works at the pace of the client's tissue's ability to let go. Enough pressure needs to be used to release the fascial adhesions, but when done slowly and with sensitivity, the pressure is not great.

A Certified Rolfer™ is much like a structural engineer evaluating the structural weaknesses that are not yet presenting problems. The cracks in walls can represent a settling foundation. Until the foundation is repaired, no matter how often the cracks are repaired, they will return. Your body is the same. Until the shortness and rotation in your leg is released, your neck may always be going “out.”

The deep changes Rolfin® SI produces will often take up to a year to fully manifest. The tighter your body, the more tension it has. The tension releases at its own pace, one layer at a time. It is common for a client to see more change in six months of integrating the Rolfin® SI changes than from the ten sessions themselves.

The myofascial releases of Rolfin® SI are the foundation for the deep structural realignment and movement enhancements Rolfin® SI is known for creating. Through the release of chronic tension, your nervous system, perception, coordination, and experience of the world can change. A tense body is bracing against the anticipation of future stress. A relaxed body moves out of its way or releases it.

The Release

As you lie on a Rolfin® SI table, your Certified Rolfer™ may lean on her elbow against your thigh. Your first sensation may be pain, producing an urge to resist. Because the Certified Rolfer™ is not increasing her pressure—actually she is just waiting for your tissue to release—you begin to relax. Through relaxing, you surrender to what might have felt like

pain, and you start to feel intense sensations. The intensity subsides as the release occurs. With the release increasing, the next sensation is pleasure.

This cycle of intensity to release to pleasure feels much like the one of stretching. The body will learn how to relax much as it does from stretching. The tensions or hypersensitivity that might have first existed can actually feel pleasurable just one session later. You learn to relax and be relaxed. Stimulation (i.e., pressure) goes from something that you want to resist to something that is pleasurable to relax into.

The processes of learning to relax on a deep level will vary with the individual. Tough guys, like myself, will often take longer than women. But you knew that...

Rolf Movement® Integration

Ida Rolf, Ph.D. encouraged the development of movement work to assist Rolfing® clients in their changes and integration. Certified Rolfers™ were always trained in movement work. Recently, all Certified Rolfers™ are being certified as Rolf Movement Practitioners.

Unlearning bad habits and learning more effective ways to use your body can obviously be a huge benefit. Some Certified Rolfers™ integrate Rolfing® Movement Integration in their structural sessions. Others do separate sessions. Either way, being aware of both methods can be very useful. They go beyond ergonomics to learning how to enhance the use of your body through exploring perception and coordination in your everyday movements.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to commit to ten sessions?

No. Most Certified Rolfers™ will just have you pay and schedule as you go. In fact, if for some reason you want to switch Certified Rolfers™ during the series, you can. It is your body and your money.

How often will I have sessions?

Anywhere from twice per week to once a month is the range. Most clients come in once per week. The frequency depends on your body's ability to integrate the work and what works best for you.

Is Rolfing® SI safe?

Yes. As long as you don't have one of the contraindications mentioned earlier (Where Is Rolfing® SI Best Used? Section), it is safe. For a Certified Rolfer™, the goal is not to force change; it is to evoke change through releasing the soft tissue. The soft tissue can't release if the Certified Rolfer™ goes too deep or too fast. Your biggest risk is wasting some time and money.

Is Rolfing® SI just stretching?

No. Rolfing® SI goes beyond stretching or yoga by releasing the tightest and hardest areas of your body. Often in stretching, only the looser places stretch. What needs to stretch are the thick, bound up areas. Stretching often produces frustration, particularly for men with those hard, thick legs. Once Rolfing® SI releases these concrete areas, then stretching can help.

Does Rolfing® SI hurt?

Yes, it can feel painful the first time in very tense areas. It is not the pain of injury. When there is pain, it is from experiencing the tension that was always there. If for some reason, you feel it might be too much, you can tell the Certified Rolfer™ to stop. You are always in charge.

How does Rolfing® SI work with pain?

With chronic pain, clients are often told there is nothing wrong. I have seen clients sent to psychiatrists to treat "imaginary pain." The interesting thing about pain, particularly soft tissue pain, is that there are no definitive tests to evaluate pain.

Chronic pain in itself becomes an escalating condition often only treated with medication. For many, the secret to ending the pain is releasing the tension and training the body to relax. Yes, this sounds simple—sometimes it is that simple. There is an interesting relationship with pain and awareness. The more pain you have, the less awareness you

have. The inverse is also true. As you become more aware, which might feel uncomfortable at first, the more you are able to release the tension causing the pain.

A Certified Rolfer™ works to assist you in releasing your chronic tension and pain. They can only do that if you are relaxing. For that to happen, you must first feel safe, then you must feel that you are in control. Only then can you let go of what you might not have been aware of before or had the ability to release.

What age range do Certified Rolfers™ treat?

From infants to the elderly. Most clients are active children or adults.

How does Rolfing® SI affect the aging process?

Through releasing the tension in the fascia, the body becomes more resilient in its structure, movement, and appearance. Most clients report feeling younger because their bodies are behaving as they did when they were young. Much of what we attribute to age is the accumulation of stress and tension.

How does Rolfing® SI affect posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, and depression?

Often a connection between these four debilitating conditions is the physical exhaustion caused by a body being stuck in hyper-arousal or survival mode. Anyone exposed to constant stress will eventually acclimatize to the stress. You learn to adapt emotionally by becoming accustomed to it and by physically sustaining an alert status. No matter how strong you are, eventually the continuous stress will wear you down and may eventually present as one or more of the above conditions.

To heal, your body must first leave the survival state—the revved-up state. Until your body feels safe, it will be allocating its resources to survival. Rolfing® SI has the ability to deeply release the stress and the self-perpetuating survival response stored in the tissue. Once the body comes down, the resources directed to survival can be used for self-healing. Your body can rest and heal.

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What does the medical community think of Rolfing®?

Physicians are referring their patients to Certified Rolfers™ in increasing numbers for chronic problems. There is a growing understanding and appreciation of Rolfing® SI, in part from Certified Rolfers™ being physicians and many physicians experiencing Rolfing® SI. The growing research on fascia continues to put Rolfing® SI in the spotlight as the therapy that treats fascial conditions.

Does insurance pay for Rolfing® SI?

Auto insurance and workers' comp often pay for Rolfing® SI. Medical insurance is more challenging. A referral from a physician and persistence with your insurance company can increase your chances of being paid.

The growth of consumer-driven healthcare plans (CDHP), wherein the employee and/or employer contribute to a fund pool used to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses for the insurer, creates more options. The funds in plans such as the plans listed below will usually pay for Rolfing® SI.

FSA — Flexible Spending Account

MSA — Medical Savings Account

HRA — Health Reimbursement Arrangement

HSA — Health Savings Account

What can I expect from a session?

Each session begins by asking you what's happened since the previous session: Is your pain gone? Did you notice anything new? The Certified Rolfer™ will observe how you move and hold your body.

A Rolfing® SI session is not a massage, but like a massage, you will be relaxed afterwards. Clients often report sleeping deeply the night after the first session and feeling relaxed and possibly tired for a few days.

There is usually no soreness after a session. When there is soreness, it isn't the type you get from an injury, but more like the feeling you might have after a good stretch or workout. Do not workout later in the day after receiving a session. The next day should be fine to exercise.

How do I choose a good Certified Rolfer™?

Ask others who have experienced Rolfing® themselves. Check out Certified Rolfers'™ web sites. Call the prospective Certified Rolfer™ personally. Ask him or her all your questions. Trust your gut. Most Certified Rolfers™ will offer a free consultation; if in doubt, try that. You only need to do one session. Yes, it is theoretically possible the Certified Rolfer™ could hurt you. My experience is that it is so rare that there is much greater risk from the effects of your tension seriously impacting your health. The worse thing that is likely to happen is you don't get exactly what you wanted.

Take a risk, give a session a try.

Not all “Rolfers” are Certified Rolfers™

More and more people are claiming they are practicing Rolfing® SI. That's good because it means Rolfing® SI is the go-to therapy. Unfortunately, these other practitioners are not doing Rolfing® SI; they were not trained at the Rolf Institute®. If they are saying “trained in the Rolf method” that is an indication they most likely are not Certified Rolfers™.

Over the years, in most cases when I traced back a complaint about a Certified Rolfer™, the “Rolfer” in question was not a Certified Rolfer™. If you have any doubt, go to the Rolf Institute® web site, www.rolf.org, to verify that the person you are considering is a Certified Rolfer™. The practitioner may be good at what he or she does, but it is not Rolfing® if he or she is not a Certified Rolfer™.

How Rolwing® SI Helps Common Problems

Here are short explanations of how Rolwing® SI can help some of our most common problems. Realize that everyone is different and there can be other variables at play. In my experience, I continue to see these responses from my clients.

Pain Is An Option

We Love Pain

How is it that the US is only 4.6% of the world population, but we consume 80% of all pain drugs? We are told “no pain, no gain,” yet we run to the medicine cabinet for a pain pill at the first sign of discomfort.

Our love of our drugs matches the level of tension in our bodies. Our culture adapted to high stress, but our bodies haven't. Over the years, we become tenser and tenser so slowly and consistently that we are unaware of it. How would you be aware of it when all your friends are responding the same way?

The tensest clients in our clinics are the ones in the most pain. Sure, they had an injury, but what makes it so painful and resistant to standard treatment is the chronic tension. In fact, their tension sets them up for injury – when you're wound really tight, the chances of getting hurt are higher. Then the high stress/tension state inevitably produces a physiology similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The body is in a survival state, orienting all its resources to stay alive.

As you habituate stress and tension, you progressively become less aware of your body. Under stress you don't feel as fully, as if you were running for your life in the forest not feeling the pain of the branches hitting your body. With constant stress, you don't feel the tension build. Then one injury or emotional crisis occurs and you are in serious PAIN. Believing that it was that last incident that caused the pain, you look at