

focus on...

FOCUS ON: ROLFING

Dr Ida Rolf spent her life exploring the healing possibilities held within the human mind and body.

At about the age of 20, Ida graduated from Barnard College in New York in 1920. She was a gifted student and at 25 she had earned her Ph.D. in Biochemistry from the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University. Over the next seven years Dr. Rolf applied her expertise at the renowned Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and attained – at the time unusually for a woman – the position of Associate Professor.

Still hungry for knowledge and personal development, in 1927 Dr. Rolf left the US and travelled to Europe. She studied mathematics and physics in Switzerland – and furthered her interest in homeopathy by studying homeopathic medicine in Geneva. Throughout the 1930s Dr. Rolf used her knowledge and experience to seek answers to the health concerns of her loved ones. Unwilling to accept the limitations of medicine at the time, Dr. Rolf embraced a wide range of approaches including osteopathy, chiropractic medicine and disciplines of the mind including yoga and Korzybski's study of consciousness.

Bringing together such a rich variety of perspectives, Dr. Rolf finally developed Structural Integration. Her ambition to introduce Structural Integration to as many

people as possible took her all over the world. Her desire was not simply to help others but to teach future generations the fruit of her life's work. Indeed Dr. Rolf dedicated the rest of her life to teaching and passing on the technique that was to later take her name. Structural Integration became and remains recognised worldwide as 'Rolfing.'

What is Rolfing?

It was Dr. Rolf's theory that the cause of human discomfort, both physical and emotional may lie in our internal connective tissue and the relationship it has with the earth's gravitational field. There is, she argued, an optimal, more natural alignment for each of us – an easier interaction between self and gravity. When through external factors this alignment is lost, it causes internal stress that can result in real discomfort. Prevent or correct the misalignment and you may eliminate or limit the stress. This is at the heart of Rolfing.

Linking all internal structures within the human frame is the fascial web. This plastic connective tissue unites the structure of the inner form and divides its individual functioning units. Fascia is constantly changing and adapting in response to demands placed on an individual's body. It reacts to particular physical damage – to a joint for example – by producing extra material to enhance stability and support. However, it can produce more than is

necessary. In time, rather than stabilizing movement it can actually reduce mobility, leading to a changed postural position and altered patterns of movement.

Dr. Rolf called this fascia the organ of form and suggested that through deliberate, accurate and targeted movement of this tissue, over all relief and well being could be achieved. Through the Rolfing touch, the elasticity and sliding capacity of the tissue can be restored and the body realigned in such a way that it can function with more ease. By introducing the influence of gravity on well being Dr. Rolf broke new ground. Scientific research supports her wisdom.





After completing ten sessions with a Certified Rolfer™, a client can expect to experience a greater sense of all over freedom. Better posture and improved movement can be expected. An enhanced understanding of how the body operates in harmony with gravity will be developed through the sessions. This new comprehension of the self can then be taken forward by the client and further experienced as a process of lifelong learning.

Who can it help?

Educating clients away from physical patterns of movement that are negative to

the whole being and out of line with gravity, a Rolfer can bring about positive changes in an individual that could last a lifetime.

Preventing discomfort is one of the objectives of Rolfing. By engaging with the self and the earth's gravity and establishing the optimal individual alignment, the client has a greater capacity to function to the best of his or her individual ability. This is in line with Dr. Rolf's belief that there is something of an inherent best individual alignment, realised through Rolfing.

Rolfing may be a new path taken by clients disappointed with their current health regime. Its holistic approach to overall wellbeing, may sit comfortably

alongside other therapies. Rolfing's greatest ambassadors are its clients. Rolfing is a reputable, trusted therapy that has been successfully undertaken and viewed as a positive experience by individuals who had previously lamented their sense of life quality and wellbeing.

In a society that values a diverse approach to healthcare, Rolfing offers a tactile, chemical free practice that may be experienced by the client as beneficial to the whole person. Clients with high body awareness, such as athletes and dancers, report and delight in the subtlest of changes that can assist in improved performance.

The 10 Series

The Rolfing "Ten Series" as defined by Rolfing UK, can be viewed as a basic recipe which all Rolfers follow to achieve their common goal of balancing the client's body in gravity. However, individual Rolfers work in different ways and also recognise that each client is unique and so adapt the recipe to suit theirs and their client's needs. The following can be viewed as a general outline of the goals and procedure for each session.

Session One - Freedom to breathe

In addition to starting work on any specific structural issues, the main goal of the first session is to free the breathing - The Rolfer aims to evoke a more balanced and efficient breathing pattern by freeing fascial restrictions around the torso, shoulders, neck and head. The Rolfer also begins the process of mobilising and horizontalising the pelvis by working around hip joints and legs. The client is shown the benefits of enhanced breathing awareness and is often given homework based on addressing specific breathing issues.

Session Two - Finding support

In this session the work is mainly with feet, lower legs and knees to establish a more stable and adaptive base of support for changes that will take place later on in the upper body. An improved awareness of our connection with the earth will also help to establish a firm sense of 'place', a sense of belonging without which it may be difficult to move on mentally and emotionally.

Session Three - Creating your space, owning your place

The goal of this session is to evoke a sense of volume and space in the body and to connect this with the client's newly found sense of 'grounding' or 'place'. Specifically, the Rolfer will invite front/back balance through work with the side surfaces of the legs, arms, torso, neck and head. Work will



continue to free the breath and evoke four way movement in ribs. Energetically, the aim is to bring awareness of energy flow down the lateral sides of body from sky to ground.

Session Four - Finding your core, connecting earth to sky

In this session we begin working to establish a core of support in the legs, from the inner arches of the feet up the inside surfaces of the legs to the pelvic floor. We also need to lengthen and ease the spinal curves and evoke sense of energy flow up through the core from ground to sky.

Session Five - The next step for humankind

Walking with grace and ease In evolutionary terms the Human species has only just learned to stand upright on two feet instead of four. Ida Rolf observed that in terms of walking with the same efficiency and ease as some of our four legged cousins we are still only at the 'toddler' stage and she firmly believed that Rolfing was here to help the Human race evolve through to the next stage in our quest to touch the stars. The theme of session five

is to teach walking with ease. Connecting the legs to the spine through iliopectineal muscle and using the spinal engine greatly improves efficiency and lessens stress and strain on the lumbar spine and hip flexors (so often the cause of low back pain).

Session Six - Freeing the spine

The goal of the Rolfer in this session is to continue the work started in session five by working with restrictions in the back, the legs and pelvis to enhance somatic awareness and bring 2-way flow of subtle movement to the spine.

Session Seven - Getting the head on straight

If you have trouble saying "yes" or "no" or suffer with continual backache, eye strain, TMJ problems, headaches or vertigo then it may just be because your head is in the wrong place. Balancing the head on the shoulders is a vital piece of the jigsaw in bringing a body into line with gravity. In this session the Rolfer continues easing restrictions in the upper back, shoulders and neck and begins work on the muscles and fascia of the face and inside the mouth for a balanced



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relationship between cranium, spine and mandible. Some Rolfers may also work with movement to evoke awareness of the three axis of cranial movement, and will often use cranio-sacral techniques to balance the cranial pulse.

Session Eight - Putting it all back together

Session eight begins the closure cycle. By now the unique structural issues of each client are in the foreground. Session eight is the final opportunity in this cycle to resolve any specific structural imbalances before bringing everything back together in sessions nine and ten.

Session Nine - Integration

Rolfing does not seek perfectionism, just the best that the body will allow in its present state of being. To this end the Rolfing process puts a vast amount of new information into the body in terms of changed structural relationships and new movement possibilities. Whilst the aim is to liberate the whole person it can also be a bit confusing on both the conscious and subconscious levels. Therefore, in the final two sessions the Rolfer must make sure that

all of this new information is integrated to the best effect by the client and that the client has a clear idea of what might be thrown away and what might be usefully explored further.

Session Ten - Closure

The last session in the series and place to finish any structural integration and also review the entire series and discuss a strategy for maintenance and ongoing improvement over the months and years ahead.

Subsequent Work -

Rolfing is effective because it remains sensitive to and works with the body's innate wisdom. Rolfing always changes the body but only at the speed it wants to change. Sometimes there is a feeling at the end of the series that just a few more sessions would complete the process. In most cases this is not a good idea. The work of Rolfing and the new body awareness that it evokes, continues to bring change long after the series is finished. It is better, therefore, to wait a few months to see where the body wants to go before receiving more work. After this initial rest

period, however, it is perfectly OK to schedule occasional sessions whenever you feel the need.

Research

There is some very interesting research emerging from the scientific community on fascia which is beginning to validate many of the theories put forward by Ida Rolf some 60 years ago when she was developing her ideas about the human structure in gravity. One of the most groundbreaking ideas to come from the most recent fascia research is that the classical anatomy books may have to be completely revised. Because it has now been proven that the connective tissue (fascial) system connects the whole body from head to toes and in fact forms a network which permeates every cell. This means that the conventional view of muscles as separate units affecting discrete parts of the body no longer holds true and in fact as Ida Rolf taught, the skeletal system is a continuum each part effecting the whole organism.

If you would like to read more about this research, see Thomas Myers and Anatomy Trains www.anatomytrains.com. There is also research which suggests that fascia is a secondary nervous system linked directly to the emotional (Limbic) brain. This would seem to give weight to Rolf's idea that our emotions affect posture in a very physical way actually catalysing structural change, for further reading go to www.somatics.de.

INFORMATION

For general information about Rolfing in the UK contact Keith Graham (contact point for UK Rolfers) on 07799333804 or info@rolfinguk.co.uk

For information on training to become a certified Rolfer in the UK visit www.britishacademyofrolfing.co.uk

Also see our Training and Education page for details of the next UK course.