



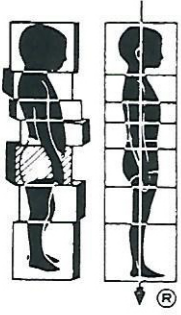
Sharon Sklar Rolfing®  
The Art & Science of Body Change

# Introduction to Rolfing®

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serving the community since 1981



# Excerpt from the Rolfing® Technique of Connective Tissue Manipulation

Originally written by Dr. Ida P. Rolf and Dr. Roger Pierce in 1976

**ROLFING** Structural Integration (SI) is a technique for reordering the body to bring its major segments - head, shoulders, thorax, pelvis and legs - toward a vertical alignment. Generally speaking, the Rolfing process lengthens the body, approaching an ideal in which the left and right sides of the body are more nearly balanced and in which the pelvis approaches horizontal, permitting the weight of the trunk to fall directly over the pelvis; the head rides above the spine, the spine curves are shallow, and the legs connect vertically to support the bottom of the pelvis.

**MAN DEALS WITH GRAVITY** in a way different from other animals. Rather than planting himself firmly on four or more supports, he has swung himself up on a narrow, unstable two-point base; he is less secure but more dynamic, more flexible, with two of his limbs free for an active and mobile contact with his world. The tightrope walker presents this image of balance and lightness in ourselves, a delicate adaptability to the forces acting on us. Man's center of gravity is high.

The key to this efficient and graceful relationship to the field of gravity is a body in which the weight transmission remains close to a vertical central axis. The amount of energy required to move weight around a vertical axis (the moment of inertia) decreases geometrically as the weight is moved toward the axis, as skaters and ballet dancers know when they achieve fast spins by pulling in their arms and legs and lengthening their bodies.

**HOW DO BODIES BECOME UNBALANCED?** From a purely mechanical perspective, distortions are the result of the remarkable plasticity of the body; the tendency of fascia, the connective tissue which envelops the muscles and which gives the body shape, to be remolded by applied force. The primary force comes from repeated patterns of self-use, the way an individual walks, sits or sleeps. These patterns, which are generally established in infancy, draw heavily on parental example and on the other environmental factors like diapers, shoes and school desks. Inefficient patterns of behavior set themselves in the fascia! network as unbalanced patterns of structure.

Distortions also enter our plastic bodies through accidents: a fall from a bicycle, for example, that twists a knee, causing a limp for a few weeks. The shifting of weight to the strong leg restructures the play of muscular effort not only in the legs, but through the pelvis, up the spine, eventually throughout the whole body. Although the limp seems to disappear as the knee strengthens, the system of compensations leaves its imprint in a broad, complex pattern of shortened fascia.

Patterns of imbalance tend to reinforce themselves; they feel comfortable and natural - balanced, in fact. Over the years they deepen by repetition, and the weight centers more progressively further from the vertical axis. Gravity becomes an increasingly destructive force.

One individual may perceive his losing fight with gravity as a sharp pain in his back, another as the unflattering contour of his body, another as constant fatigue, yet another as an unrelentingly threatening environment. Those over 40 may begin to call it old age. And yet all these signals may be pointing to a single problem, so ubiquitous in their own structure as well as in function that it has been ignored: they are off balance. They are all at war with gravity.

**ROLFING SI REBALANCES** the fascial network by taking advantage of its tendency to hold the shapes induced by applied force.

In a carefully worked-out sequence of manipulations, the Rolfer reverses the randomizing influence of the environment, moving tissue back toward the symmetry and balance that the architecture of the body so clearly calls for.

The RESULTS OF ROLFING SI are as varied and complex as the organisms being altered. Generally speaking, the body acquires a lift, or lightness as the head and chest go up and the trunk lengthens; the pelvis, in horizontalizing, brings the abdomen and buttocks in; the knees and feet track more nearly forward and the soles of the feet meet the ground more squarely. As the joints gain freedom the major segments of the body rotate and hinge more freely on one another. There is less pitching of the body from side to side in walking and less raising of the body weight with each step.

The lengthening and centering of the body along its vertical axis together with an increased engagement of the deep musculature brings a quieting, a flexible sense of self-possession that tends to replace earlier pre-structured responses. Many people have experienced a striking reversal when a vicious cycle of energy drain and structural break down has been replaced by progressive self-enhancement.

*Full pamphlet is available from The Rolf Institute® of Structural Integration.*

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# ROLFING®

## Structural Balance Opens Potential

***Rolfing is dedicated to the exploration of the concept that the human body has transformational potential for the total being.***

*- Rolf Institute Standards of Practice*

Picture an old barn falling down. That is what time and stress do to structures, both human and otherwise. Perhaps there is another possibility for the “more human use of human beings” as Dr. Ida P. Rolf has put it; for Rolfing involves moving toward an embodiment of ideas and an inquiry into the nature of human structure.

Picture having a body and spirit that are wide and free, living in opening rather than in the painful, narrow constriction of old set patterns, closed hearts, and fear-filled attitudes. Picture a blade of grass - how delicately it responds to the slightest breeze and how it bends low before the hurricane, surviving when the mightiest trees have fallen. A structure that is rigid and poorly balanced lacks resilience. A structure that is flexible and in dynamic relationship with its surroundings only bends with stress and then springs back.

As a fish lives in the medium of water, humans live within the field of gravity. Harmony with gravity enables that medium to become a supporting and energizing factor. As the fish is supported and lifted by water, so we as humans can be supported and lifted by gravity.

*Some individuals may perceive their losing fight with gravity as a sharp pain in their back, others as the unflattering contour of their body, others as a constant fatigue. Yet others as an unrelentingly threatening environment. Those over 40 may call it old age. And yet all these signals may be pointing to a single problem, so prominent in their own structure, as well as others, that it has been ignored: they are off balance. They are at war with gravity.*

*- Ida P. Rolf, Ph.D.*

### **Structure Determines Function**

How does a body become off balance? The human body is a miraculous construction of fluid and dynamic interrelationships. This finely tuned instrument, the vehicle of the spirit, has a plastic quality and can change shape. Falls, illnesses, psychological stress, even the way a child copies his/ her parents, all leave a mark in the structure as the body's natural adaptability works to integrate any injury or continuing attitude into the rest of the system.

Thus, when an ankle is sprained, there is swelling and pain in order at first to immobilize the injured area. Later, after healing occurs, adhesions may remain; and the joint is caught in a less flexible, less efficient position. As the entire body adapts to favoring the one ankle, a rotation can develop in the pelvis with one shoulder going higher to offset the higher hip and the head moving over to rest in line with the supporting leg. After years of this pattern, the body becomes “set” as fascia (connective tissue) thickens and hardens around points of stress. Then an attempt to stand up straight becomes filled with effort, as the constricting areas prevent the body's natural lift toward verticality.

Psychological trauma such as physical abuse, abandonment, feelings of inadequacy, attitudes of fear and anger, also affect structure. Tightening against pain, holding the breath to block emotions, slumping in order not to feel too big, become physically locked in the body and thus perpetuate the attitude.

*... no situation exists in a human which a psychologist would diagnose as a feeling of insecurity or inadequacy unless it is accompanied by a physical situation which bears witness to the fact that the gravitational support is inadequate.*

- Ida P. Rolf, Ph.D.

## **The Body Is A Plastic Medium**

Rolfing works to free these holding patterns and to move the structure back to a balance of body segments in a vertical line. This is accomplished through the plastic nature of the connective tissue. Connective tissue is made up of a protein called collagen. Collagen responds to the pressure and warmth of the Rolfer's hands by becoming more fluid; and by the fibers in its ground substance then realigning themselves along points of the newly established line of balance. With controlled pressure and direction, the Rolfer's hands loosen the fascial sheaths that surround the muscles, thus realigning the tissue around the joints.

Rolfing is mainly an educational process, and thus there is ongoing communication between Rolfer and client. The client is often asked to make certain movements while the Rolfer is working. This helps the client to find and feel new patterns of movement. The relationship between Rolfer and client is a special one. As trust, honesty, and openness develop, the Rolfing process becomes an arena for personal transformation on the part of both Rolfer and client.

## **Gravity As The Therapist**

Results of Rolfing are as varied as the people undergoing the process. As the body moves back to the symmetry of its original design, gravity becomes a supporting and energizing force. The release of stress and chronic pains (especially low back pain) that often follow Rolfing is not due to having addressed any particular pathology, but rather to the body's own healing power when freed to assume its proper position.

*...when the body gets working appropriately, the force of gravity can flow through. Then, spontaneously the body heals itself.*

- Ida P. Rolf, Ph.D.

A feeling of well-being and self-confidence develops as the structure returns to its dynamic, upright support. The person feels lighter, freer, and has a higher level of energy. Old attitudes that were held and encouraged by stuck body patterns become easier to recognize and release. Daily tasks and athletic performance are often enhanced as energy locked up in maintaining support is freed .

*...there is an ongoing psychological change as well toward balance. toward serenity. Toward a more whole person. The whole person evidences a more apparent, more potent psychic development.*

- Ida P. Rolf, Ph.D.

As flesh and spirit are inseparable, the whole being moves home to the perfection intended in its creation.

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***Rolfing is not intended to be a substitute for medical treatment. It does not attempt to diagnose or prescribe. Its purpose is to bring order to structure, and it is through the accomplishment of that purpose that the function of the whole person is enhanced.***



Sklar described Rolfing as “an art and science of body manipulation for health.”



“I was 22 when I got Rolfed and I just knew it was what I was going to do for the rest of my life. Now, here I am in my 35th year and ... I look forward to Monday mornings. I love what I do.”

Sklar described Rolfing as “an art and science of body manipulation for health.” The body stores the fallout from physical and emotional injuries, illnesses, stress and unhealthy habits. By working on the connective tissue, the stored blocks are released so spontaneous healing can occur.

People come for relief of pain, injuries and stiffness, as well as to improve their athletic performance and their appearance, rebalance their bodies, and enhance personal growth. Rolfing can also help when used before and after surgery.

Named after its founder, Dr. Ida P. Rolf, Rolfing Structural Integration is a form of bodywork that reorganizes the connective tissues, called fascia, which permeates the entire body. The goal is to reorder the body to bring its major segments – head, shoulders, thorax, pelvis and legs – into vertical alignment.

Like chiropractic methods, Rolfing aims to align the body. However, chiropractic does it by manipulating bones while Rolfing works on the soft tissue so it stops pulling at the bones.

A common misconception is that Rolfing is painful, Sklar said.

“I look at it this way,” she said. “You hire me to help you find the places in your body that are stopping you. So, we have to confront it, so my hands ... move in. The

pressure creates friction, the friction creates heat and the heat begins to dissolve the gluing of the fascia. It’s deep movement like this throughout your body, finding the places where you’re all stuck together and we get you unstuck.”

Treatment is always done at a level that the client finds comfortable.

Rolfing takes place in a series of 10 sessions, each about 75 minutes, over a span of three or four months. Each session builds on the previous one. Some people choose to return at some later time for further sessions, generally if other traumas occur.

Sklar had work to do before she could apply to The Rolf Institute in Colorado.

“The prerequisites took a long time. You had to learn how to touch a body first,” she said. “When I went to Rolfing school, it was a minimum of 25 years old; it was a minimum of a college degree; college-level courses in anatomy, kinesiology, physiology and psychology; then a certification in therapeutic massage.”

Then there was a two-day interview before she was accepted to the course that consisted of two 12-week sessions. After practicing for several years, she went on to get her Advanced Rolfing Certification.

After working in various places, including the Rolf Institute and in

a naturopathic physician’s office, 20 years ago, Sklar bought the house on South Main Street in West Hartford that now houses her office. The space is quiet and

peaceful; a large table takes up about a quarter of the room and two dogs sleep on cushions along the far wall.

Clients have ranged in age from 3 weeks to 99 years old. The majority are 40-70, with a lot in their 80s. Most have come because they’ve tried everything else with no success.

Jane Comerford of West Hartford said she turned to Rolfing after her massage therapist commented that her fascia was so tight, she couldn’t get to her muscles.

“I had lots of muscle aches. I would get a massage once a month, but it didn’t hold. ... My posture was starting to not be great,” she said, adding, “It made a big difference in terms of my pain level – a big difference.”

After her initial 10 sessions, she has returned frequently over the years – not only to help with the effects of injuries, but as a form of prevention.

“I’m hard on my body,” Comerford said. “Massage was soothing, but it didn’t get to the root of the issue. Sharon’s the real deal. She knows anatomy. She knows the body. She’s able to pinpoint what’s going wrong.”

Grant Tyler, agreed, saying, “She is really skilled. She really knows the body. ... She is one of the best body workers I’ve ever been to. She’s amazing. ... I very highly recommend her.”

He had thought about the benefits of Rolfing for 30 years, but it took a head-on collision a year ago – and no relief from the whiplash that resulted despite chiropractic care – that led him to Sklar.

After recently completing the 10 sessions, he said he no longer feels the effects of the accident.

“Literally, after my first session, my neck felt 40 percent better

– and she only did minimal work exactly on my neck.”

Rolfing has also helped Sklar get through a bulging disk in her back, breast cancer and the side

effects of its treatment, a car accident and Bell’s palsy. At one point, she underwent nine surgical procedures in less than three years.

Understanding the body’s structure helped her heal herself and the journey made her stronger.

“It’s really all about getting balanced,” she said. “Dr. Ida P. Rolf said, ‘When the body gets working appropriately, it will spontaneously heal itself.’ That’s been my mantra for my whole life. ... At 61, I’m the most fit I’ve ever been.”

Sklar and her older dog have been in the pet therapy program at Hartford Hospital. She’s also a mentor in the public schools. **WHL**

*For more information, call Sharon Sklar at 860-561-4337, visit [sharonsklarrolfing.com](http://sharonsklarrolfing.com) or send email to [sharonsklarrolfing@gmail.com](mailto:sharonsklarrolfing@gmail.com).*

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**–Sharon Sklar**

# CranioSacral Therapy

The history of CranioSacral Therapy dates back to the early 1900's when osteopathic physician William Sutherland was struck by the unusual idea that the bones of the skull were structured to allow for movement. For more than 20 years he explored this concept and eventually developed a system of examination and treatment known as Cranial Osteopathy.

In 1970, Dr. John Upledger observed the rhythmic movement of the craniosacral system firsthand during surgery. None of his colleagues or any medical texts could explain this discovery. Two years later, Dr. Upledger attended a seminar that explained Sutherland's ideas and he was quick to understand how a hydraulic system using cerebrospinal fluid might function inside a membranous sac encased within the skull and spinal column canal. He then began his inquiry and development of this technique.

In 1975, Dr. Upledger was asked to join the Osteopathic College at Michigan State University as a clinical researcher and Professor of Biomechanics. He led a team of anatomists, physiologists, biophysicists and bioengineers to test and document the influence of therapy on the craniosacral system. This work resulted in the development of CranioSacral Therapy. Dr. Upledger has authored three textbooks on the subject and two books for the general public: *Your Inner Physician and You* and *A Brain is Born: Exploring the Birth and Development of the Central NeNous System*.

In 1985, Dr. Upledger founded the Upledger Institute Inc., a clinical and educational resource center in Florida to teach the public and other healthcare practitioners about the benefits of CranioSacral Therapy. To date, more than 27,000 healthcare practitioners worldwide have been trained in this technique. I was a very lucky person to have discovered this technique years ago and had the opportunity to learn from John, himself, during a ten day workshop for 25 people in NYC in the fall of 1982.

The validity of the cardiovascular and respiratory rhythms are certainly not disputed today. Yet for eons, the very existence of these systems sparked debate in medical communities around the globe. Using the rhythm of the craniosacral system to enhance body functioning and help alleviate pain and dysfunction is now becoming more popular and well-known.

The craniosacral system consists of the membranes and cerebrospinal fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord, which make up the central nervous system. Imbalances or restrictions in the membranous sac and associated normal rhythms could potentially cause any number of sensory, motor or neurological disabilities. These problems could include chronic pain, eye difficulties, scoliosis, motor coordination impairments, learning disabilities and other health challenges.

CranioSacral Therapy is a gentle method of detection and correction that encourages the client's own natural healing mechanisms to dissipate negative effects from stress, structural imbalance or impingement on the central nervous system. Clients can also benefit from better overall health, relief from chronic neck problems and resistance to disease. The sessions are about an hour, the client stays clothed and gentle manipulations are done to free the suture lines of the cranial plates and increase the craniosacral rhythm.