

Have you been Rolf-ed?[®] Optimising our body structure to function better

By Jason Lim

“What conditions must be fulfilled in order for the human body-structure to be organized and integrated in gravity so that the whole person can function in the most optimal and economical way?”

This fundamental question was posed decades ago by a pioneer and leader in soft tissue manipulation and movement education, Dr Ida Pauline Rolf (1896 – 1979). The conditions she proposed for this to happen were revolutionary in her day and are still being understood today. Dr Ida Rolf formulated a 10 session series of education and soft tissue manipulation to create a technique we know today as Rolfing[®]. I met with one of the four accredited Rolfers[™] in Singapore, Mr Hee Tan from Posture Connection, to understand more about this unique system.

What Is Rolfing[®]?

Rolfing was originally described as “Structural Integration” by its founder Dr Ida P. Rolf. Rolfing is a well established, scientifically validated system of body restructuring and movement education. It releases the body’s segment – legs, torso, arms etc. – from life-long patterns of tension and bracing and permits gravity to re-align them. By doing so, it balances the body.

Of all the forces affecting the human body, gravity is among the most powerful. Body misalignment in gravity results in chronic strain, lowered vitality and impaired biological and psychological functioning. Because the body is better-balanced after Rolfing, it expends less

of its vital energies against gravity. People of all ages come to Rolfing for help with neck pain, back problems, impaired mobility and other difficulties which originate with internal strains. Others seek to improve their appearance, to improve athletic performance, and to enhance personal growth toward a fuller realization of their potential. Rolfing results in a feeling of fitness and wholeness. People who have been Rolfed stand and move with more surety and grace than before.

How Does Rolfing Align The Body?

To align the body segments, Rolfing systematically organizes the body’s soft, connective tissue network. This connective tissue network, known as the myofascial system, is “the organ of structure” in the body. It supports the skeleton and soft tissues, positions the bones, determines the direction of muscle pulls and of movement, and gives the body its shape.

The human body holds itself erect with pairs of muscle groups functioning within a network of fascial sheaths. These pairs normally function in an antagonist relationship with one another. When one of the pair contracts the other must extend to maintain proper balance. If that relationship is impaired through injury or chronic tension in one of the groups, the fascia conforms to the shortening and the rest of the body must compensate to maintain balance. The job of Rolfing is to free the shortened fascia, allow the muscles to return to a balanced relationship and the body to release the

compensations. When the myofascial system is organized, gravity causes it to uplift and align the body’s segments. The actual experience of a person being Rolfed is akin to being stretched gently yet firmly to realign and reposition soft tissues that causing tension or stress due to misuse or underuse.

The Rolfing Series

The basic Rolfing series consists of ten sessions. A Rolfer[™] starts by evaluating the client’s structure and by taking photographs (optional) for later reference. The client is then asked to lie on the table, as the Rolfer sensitively applies just the right amount of pressure where the fascia is restricted.

The client may be asked to breathe into the area being worked and/ or to make synchronized movements. The combination of applied pressure and synchronized response frees and repositions the connective tissues and aligns the body’s segments.

Each Rolfing session builds upon the results of the previous one, so that the results are cumulative. The first seven sessions remove strain from specific areas of the body: the lower back, neck, knees, etc. The remaining sessions organise and align the body as a whole, resulting in better balance, enhanced freedom of movement, and a higher energy level.

With the help of a sampling session of Rolfing, I left the interview feeling “up-lifted” and light. Mr Tan assures me that this is a normal by-product of a Rolfing session as the muscles that were previously contracted and tense have now become almost miraculously loosened. **ehb**