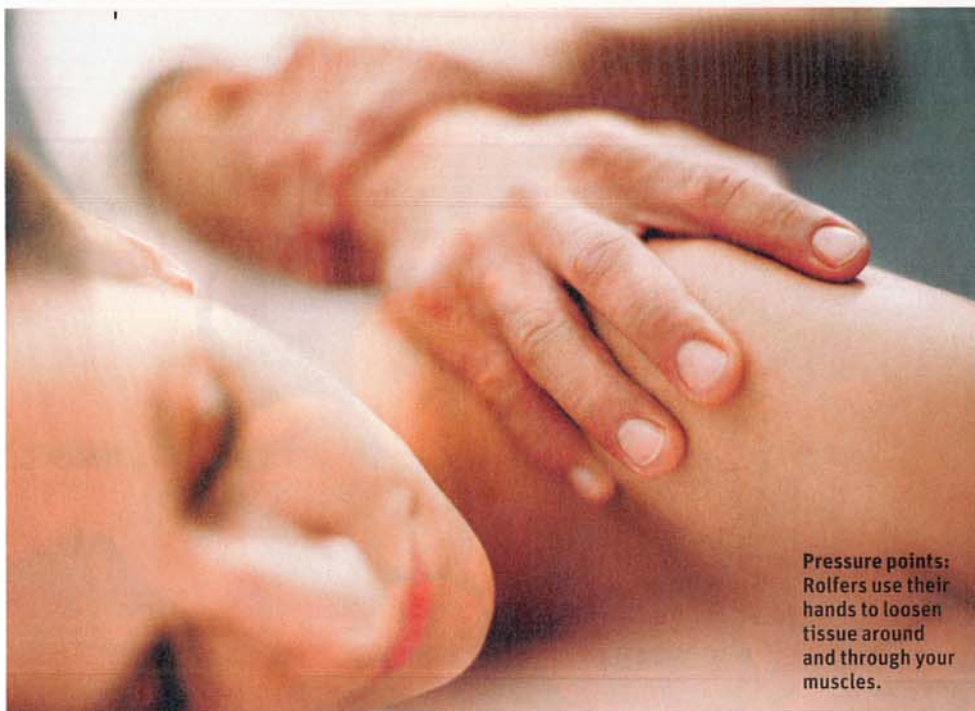


A new word for relief

A body therapy with a funny name may be the right fix for your aches. *Seriously.* By Rosie Molinary



Pressure points: Rolfers use their hands to loosen tissue around and through your muscles.

I'll try almost anything to get rid of my chronic calf, hamstring, and hip pain—even a therapy with an embarrassing name. So when I tell my husband about Rolfing, his juvenile reaction doesn't faze me.

"Rolfing? Do you know what that sounds like?" he says with a frat-house smirk. Of course I do; I went to college, too. But I want permanent relief—something more than my husband's massages can do—so I don't

care whether it's called Rolfing, ralphing, or something sillier.

I'm a cyclist and runner, but when I do either one, my muscles often lock up like my testy computer. I've tried yoga, massage, and physical therapy, but the relief is always too brief. So I decided to take a friend's advice and give Rolfing a try.

Now I'm among the million-plus who have "Rolfed" since Ida Rolf, PhD, started teaching her "structural integration" technique in 1971. In

this massage-like treatment, a therapist, or Rolfer, uses her hands and elbows to manipulate the tissues, or fascia, that run through and around your muscles and organs (like your uterus and kidneys, but don't worry—no elbows touch these areas). Unlike deep-tissue massage, which focuses on relaxing the muscles, Rolfing concentrates on loosening up the fascia and teaching your body to move properly.

Rolf believed that overusing, improperly using, and injuring your muscles strains the fascia, taking you out of your natural alignment and making it difficult to move in healthy ways. Rolfing therapists train at one of five institutes worldwide.

Today, Rolfing is popular with athletes and entertainers (ice skating star Michelle Kwan and singer Willie Nelson have tried it). But regular folks use it, too—for pain relief, improved posture, and better performance. Its benefits are similar to massage in terms of pain and stress relief.

Mainstream experts think it may be useful for some people. "I am a believer in soft-tissue techniques," says Nicholas DiNubile, MD, spokesman for the American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons. "First you need to get checked by a physician, but if there is nothing serious going on, it's one way for people with a lot of stress or recurrent muscle tension to get help."

Pain, pain, go away

I've got plenty of recurrent muscle tension. Those calves are ridiculously taut after 30 years of walking on my toes; my hips are tight from constantly tucking a foot under me when I sit; my left knee seems forever turned to the right, leaving me with a super-stiff hamstring; and I'm so wing-footed that people assume I'm a ballerina.

At my first appointment with Beth

A new word for relief continued

Burgin, a certified Rolfer near my home in Charlotte, North Carolina, I pace the room in my underwear while she studies my movements. She ticks off little things: a droopy left hip, a fallen arch, a forward tilt in my right shoulder. Later, on the table, she applies firm strokes and gentle pressure to the fascia around my hot spots with her hands, fingers, and elbows, first pressing as if to make them say “Uncle” and then lengthening the tissue once it loosens.

Hurts so good

It's mildly uncomfortable, but in a “hurts-so-good” sort of way. I speak up when Burgin moves beyond that, using her guide of never going past a 7 on a discomfort scale of 1 to 10. She suggests that I soak in a hot bath after a session, just to ease any discomfort, but I never feel the need.


I am skeptical by nature, but by the second of my 10 sessions, I feel I'm

How to find your own Rolfer

Visit www.rolf.org to find a Rolfer. Ask about experience, training, and style, and describe your concerns. Not all Rolfiging is created equal—it can be different with different practitioners. Therapists with an “Advanced Rolfer” credential have at least 3 years of experience and more training than “Certified” Rolfers. Start with just a few sessions to make sure it's right for you; that should be enough to see results. A session lasts 90 minutes and costs between \$75 and \$125 (most insurance plans won't cover it).

in a whole new body. Session two pays off the next time I run: I breathe more deeply, and I don't stop every mile to stretch because my calves are no longer locking up. My left hamstring quits its 2-year ache. Strangers now compliment my posture. I cycle faster. I am a half-inch taller. And after Burgin works on my feet, my shoes seem too small. When I buy new running shoes, the salesman (who has fitted me for years) notices that I suddenly have arches.

Did someone say I'm a skeptic?

I'm scared I'll lose this new body if I don't continue my twice-monthly visits, but Burgin reassures me. After 10 sessions, she says, you can take 6 months to a year off. Tune-ups two to four times a year make sense if you revert to an old habit or get injured, but they're not always necessary. And as good as I feel now, I know why.  *Freelance writer Rosie Molinary's book about Latina body image is to be published by Seal Press next spring.*

WEB WATCH Health searches you can trust



Let's say you're wondering which has more antioxidants: green or black tea. Google spits out more than 71.4 million results—many of them ads. That's why we love Healthline (www.healthline.com), a medical search site that highlights only trustworthy destinations (like Health.com, of course). That tea search produces 78 hits, including doctor-reviewed encyclopedia entries, and sites of prestigious hospitals (like the Mayo Clinic) and government agencies (like

the National Institutes of Health). The site also suggests related searches, such as drugs that interact with green tea or the health effects of caffeine. It turns up some ads, too, but they're clearly labeled. “Intelligent search” sites, such as www.mammahealth.com and www.kosmix.com, also work pretty well. But Healthline strikes the best balance between providing too much and too little information. (Oh, and by the way, green tea trumps black.) —Eric Steinmehl