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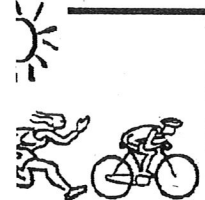
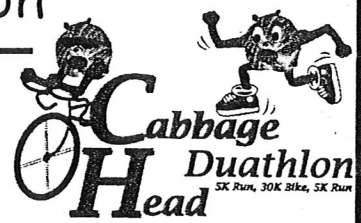


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Running

Rolfing for Runners

Aligning your body can strengthen your stride

By Darrin Eisman

You've tried new shoes, you've taken some time off, and you've stretched more than a box of rubber bands, but you still don't feel quite right on your daily runs.

Instead, you are plagued by a string of seemingly unrelated injuries, aches and pains. But are they really unrelated?

To the trained eye of Debra Kuresman, the answer to that question is most likely, "No."

With more than two decades of Rolfing under her belt, Kuresman is confident saying, "Only a few clients were actually born to run. Most aren't that lucky."

Rolfing, also known as Structural Integration, was developed by Dr. Ida P. Rolf in the 1950s. Rolf, a biochemist at Rockefeller University, believed that by reshaping the fascia, or connective tissues, one could bring the body back to its optimal alignment.

This is done by working the entire body as a whole and, in the process, eliminating the imbalances caused by the body's tendency to compensate for injuries—imbalances that may seem totally unrelated to the initial problem.

To give you a better visual image of what's going on, Rolfers liken the body to a stack of blocks. When squarely stacked, one atop the other, the blocks are in perfect balance with gravity. If one block is shifted out of alignment, then every block on top of it must be offset in one direction or another to compensate for the shift. This less stable tower may continue to stand, but it is at much greater risk of toppling.

Like the stack of blocks, the runner's body is also in a constant battle with gravity. With each stride, the runner sends a shockwave

throughout his body, and the repetitive nature of running accentuates structural defects.

And just as the other blocks in the stack must compensate for that first one that has shifted out of alignment, other areas of the body must compensate for any imbalances as well. Rolfing works to unwind these patterns through a combination of physical manipulation and education about proper movement.

While the untrained eye may find that Rolfing looks very similar to massage, any Rolfer will tell you that they are, indeed, quite different.

Massage tends to work the muscles, utilizing a circular motion to address individual parts of the system. Rolfing, on the other hand, looks at the body as a whole. Through the application of slow, directional pressure, the Rolfer concentrates on reshaping the fascia.

The fascia is relatively plastic. It can change its shape and retain those changes. "The goal of Rolfing is to sculpt the body, and remold it to what it ideally should be," says Kuresman.

Rolfing is typically performed in a one-time 10-session series. Ideally, these will take place once per week for a 10-week period. Afterwards, some patients will revisit the Rolfer for an occasional "tune-up," but these are done on an "as needed" basis.

On your initial visit, the therapist will make trained observations as you stand, walk and move around the office. Then the work begins, following a specific sequence of therapy developed a half-century ago by Dr. Rolf. Though each session will have a general theme, Kimberly Johnson, a Structural Integrator in the Boulder

area, says that the delivery of the session will vary depending on the Rolfer, as well as on the patient's needs.

Johnson recommends trying out from one to three sessions before making the commitment to the full 10-session program. The first three sessions can really be "stand-alone" ones. They will give you the opportunity to develop a working relationship with your therapist—or perhaps determine that maybe this therapist, or Rolfing, isn't right for you.

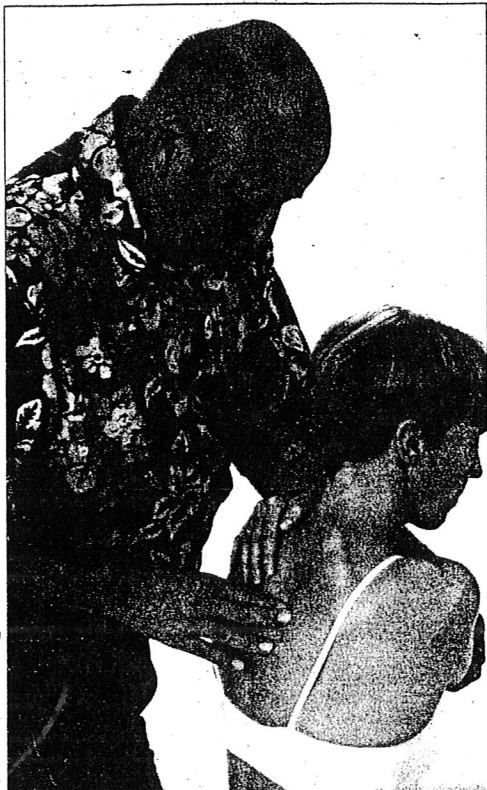
Once you make the commitment to the fourth session, you are basically in for the long haul. Sessions 4 and 5 are essentially two halves of a single treatment, and like the rest of

the first seven "Landmark Sessions," each will have a particular emphasis based on Dr. Rolf's work. Sessions 8 through 10, however, are the integrative hours, and the emphasis is not so much on making changes as it is on balancing out those changes based on your own individual needs.

In her 24 years as a Rolfer, Kuresman says that most people gravitate to bodywork, like Rolfing, after they suffer an injury or have a problem. Kuresman, however, recommends investing in Rolfing before you get hurt. "This bit of preventative maintenance can increase your performance, help to speed up recovery, and basically free up any physical restrictions you may have so you can get the most out of your running," she says.

But Rolfing isn't cheap—a one-hour session typically costs between \$75 and \$125 dollars, roughly twice the price of the standard one-hour sports massage—and it isn't always comfortable either.

Talk to half-a-dozen people who have been Rolfed, and you are likely to hear at least one story about the pain associated with the treat-



Unwinding with the help of a Rolfer can help realign your body and get your running back on track.

ment—but that is often followed by, "But it hurt so good."

Johnson agrees that the treatment is very intense, however the pain associated with a session really varies depending on the perceptions of the recipient and just how "wound-up" the area being treated has gotten. The goal of Rolfing is to unwind those areas and, "The change is so great, and the results so tangible and profound that it really doesn't matter that it was uncomfortable," Johnson says.

Former Saturn cyclist Julie Hudetz went through 10 sessions of Rolfing in 1998, and describes the treatment as feeling similar to a deep tissue massage, but, she says, "I noticed enough benefits to say that it was definitely worth it."

With more than 120 certified Rolfers in Colorado alone, there is sure to be one near you. Perhaps now is the time to take the plunge and invest in your future.

To locate a Rolfer or Structural Integrator in your area and to learn more about the practice, visit the Rolf Institute's website at www.rolf.org.

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