

Rolfing puts body back in alignment

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Imagine a car out of alignment — it shakes, becomes difficult to drive and veers severely to one side.

When this happens, most drivers take the car to the mechanic to get the kinks worked out.

Unfortunately they don't usually take their bodies to a masseuse with the same frequency.

This results in a severely misaligned body, characterized by slumping shoulders, aches and emotional disconnection.

That's where Rolfing, or Structural Integration, comes in.

Developed in the 1920s by Ida Rolf, a biochemist, Rolfing works to realign the body so that each bone and muscle group supports the others. Rolfers believe that as the body no longer strains against gravity, it begins to work better and pain disappears.

"This is the gospel of Rolfing: When the body gets working appropriately, the force of gravity can flow through. Then, spontaneously, the body heals itself," Rolf said to her students.

Stress can cause the body to become out of alignment as tension tightens certain muscles, which then pull other bones and muscle groups out of alignment, according to Rolfers.

"What we're trying to do is help someone not just relax tight muscles, but rather unpeel or unwind chronic tension," said Sam Johnson, a Rolfer in Dallas.

To accomplish this Rolfers listen to a client's complaints — chronic back pain, shin splints — and then try to fix the system that caused the injury.

They touch the muscles to search for imbalances. They then separate fascia layers and muscles that have been pulled out of position. After that, Rolfers work to move the body into a position where every muscle supports the other and a person no longer struggles against gravity. Structural Integrators also work to educate their clients so that with time people find better ways to handle stress, or perform activities so that the body remains in balance.

Achieving muscular balance sometimes becomes uncomfortable for clients.

"Five or 10 minutes out of every session is usually painful," Johnson said. "Often one out of the 10 sessions is difficult."

However, Johnson stressed that the clients are in control of the session.

"I tell my clients there will be times when it feels good, and times when it hurts and feels good at the same time. If it gets beyond that let me know," he said. "I don't want them to be in pain where they have to tighten up. We'll find another way to get the job done."

Duane D. Moore, who grew up in Weslaco and lived in the Valley for 30 years, has never needed another way to get the job done.

"There's never been any pain for me," he said.

Moore, who has been a client of Johnson's since 2002, uses Rolfing as part of his personal preventive maintenance program.

"I'm trying to hang on to the years I have left and make them as healthy as possible," the 75 year old said.

After completing the original 10-week session in 2002, he continued to visit Johnson once a month for a tune-up.

"Every time I've gone in there I've got off the Rolfing table feeling better. I highly recommend it; everyone in the world needs it. I wouldn't give up, unless it became financially impossible."

Facts on Rolfing



There are 1.360 certified Rolfers in 26 countries.

In the U.S., Rolfers practice in nearly all 50 states, with concentrations on the East and West Coast and in Colorado.

Client population ranges from infancy to old age, and is distributed equally between genders.

It is estimated that more than 1 million people have received Rolfing work.

-- Courtesy of The Rolf Institute of Structural Integration