

# Relieving Chronic Pain

BY ROBERT TOPOREK

**R**elieving chronic pain, transforming one's posture, turning stress into vitality, increased confidence and self expression — sound too good to be true? These are some of the benefits of Rolfing for women.

Our posture tells the world quite a bit about us — whether you want it to or not. Your body keeps an accurate record of all the trauma and troubles you've had in your life. Accidents. Abuse. Attitudes. Stress. All are right there for everyone to see. No matter how you dress or try to conceal who you are inside, body language never lies.

And poor posture is a pain. It can trigger physical ills such as chronic backache, headaches and migraines, shoulder and neck discomfort, tension and physical stress, arthritis-like pain, and even sexual dysfunction. Quite simply, poor posture is a pain, and the older you get the worse it becomes.

## WHAT IS ROLFING?

Rolfing, developed by a woman in the late 60's, is a body-mind therapy program that liberates your body from the structural patterns of tension that you have inherited or acquired. Rolfing literally "re-postures" your body and your life. The results are immediate and permanent. The technique is as pleasurable as getting a good massage. In the initial 10 corrective sessions, you'll experience dramatic improvements in your stance and bearing. You will gain a new feeling of freedom, grace, ease, and balance.

From the moment that we are conceived, flexor muscles that contract overpower muscles that extend. Over time, through both trauma and imitation, these patterns literally become ingrained in our structures and impact how we experience and express our lives. Many of these patterns become ingrained through early childhood experiences.

A child who slumps physically slumps mentally and emotionally. Conversely, a child whose body is balanced and who moves gracefully and confidently reflects an inner grace and confidence. However, as conscientious parents can be all too painfully aware, not all children carry their bodies so well. Thus, we have come to "read" those timid, tense, or distorted bodies as dramatizing needs that are not otherwise being communicated. Parental concern is to produce a balanced child. Rolfing is an immediately effective means of addressing this objective. However, far too many children grow up with little to no touch and with no concern for their postural development.

Rolfing involves manipulation of the major muscle groups and the connective tissue, which is called fascia. This manipulation is designed to bring the body's soft tissue to its anatomically efficient position. The induced changes are eventually made permanent by the more efficient patterns of movement that result.



The net effect is a significant decrease in the amount of stress experienced in the body during both normal and strenuous activities.

To understand Rolfing, it is important to consider the nature of fascia "bands." Fascia forms a continuous network throughout every part of the body. Deep fascia, as the name suggests, is found deep inside the body. It surrounds and attaches itself to the various interior structures of the body — to the membranes that cover the bones, to the membranes that envelop each primary bundle of muscle fibers, and to ligaments, vessels, nerves, bursa, lymph nodes, viscera, joints, and cartilage. In the muscles, it forms walls and separates the major muscle groups. It functions as a system of protection, padding, insulation, separation, and support for various body tissues and organs, and the nerves and vessels that run through them. Fascial tissue responds to physical and emotional trauma by shortening and thickening. Over time, this has the effect of pulling the body out of its balanced vertical alignment. An unbalanced body will compensate to combat the downward pull of gravity, and this drains additional energy. The resulting distress is cumulative; the body becomes more and more out of balance as time passes.

## CONSIDER THE EXAMPLE OF A CHILD WHO FALLS ON HIS KNEE.

Though this is not a serious injury, it causes pain for several days. To ease the discomfort, the child favors the leg. Neighboring muscle groups are used to support the changed pattern of weight bearing. The fascia in the distressed areas thickens or sticks together to support the increase load on these muscles. A lifetime of such bumps and knocks causes a body to lose its vertical alignment and natural grace. Emotional trauma has a comparable effect. A child who is often yelled at and criticized may carry his head tipped downward as an emotional response to the hostility he has experienced. Over time, the head hanging reaction becomes chronic; the muscles in the back of the neck become enveloped with thickened fascia. The child develops and changes, but the head tends to remain in its set position. Not only does the imbalanced posture become set, but the associated emotional feelings of inadequacy become "locked up" in the musculature as well. These distortions in one part of the body cause distorting compensations in other areas. The fascia has a tendency to tighten in a chain reaction. For example, a tilted head may cause thickening in the neck; at the other end of the trunk this imbalance may cause the pelvis to tilt; this in turn may cause the knees to lock, and so on.

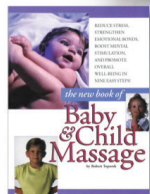
This is why we observe and work on the entire body when an injury occurs. It is as important to work on the compensations as it is to work on the original injury. As Dr. Rolf routinely told us, "Work where it isn't," for if only the immediately distorted or immediately distressed areas are Rolfed, the ignored compensations eventually operate to pull the body out of line again. This is one of the unique aspects of Rolfing.

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