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Rolfing: Defying Gravity A Bigger Context

Rolfing by Robert Toporek

Advanced Certified Rolf Practitioner since 1975

One of the goals of this paper/article is to begin to distinguish the power and importance of touch and raise \$500,000 this year to begin a 3-5 year scientific research project to demonstrate, document and promote the benefits of our programs for economically challenged families and children. Through my nonprofit work we have access to literally hundreds of families and children that would benefit from Rolfing but can barely afford \$100 for a computer. Many of these families have babies and children with developmental challenges. This work is being sponsored by our IRS 501 c3 approved nonprofit arm www.teamchildren.org

In an article by Crystal Leonard, she states "Touch is by far the most interesting and necessary of the five senses." Any movement requires an acute awareness of one's own body, which is gained through proprioception, an internal form of tactile sense. The sense of touch develops before all other senses in embryos, and is the main way in which infants learn about their environment and bond with other people. This sense never turns off or takes a break, and it continues to work long after the other senses fail in old age. Throughout life people use their sense of touch to learn, protect themselves from harm, relate to others, and experience pleasure. Interestingly, positive touch from others is necessary for an individual's healthy development. Despite the presence of all other life requirements, without this positive touch infants will fail to thrive. Compared to the other senses, touch is very hard to isolate, because tactile sensory information enters the nervous system from every single part of the body. As a result, very little research has been done on touch. However, recent studies have attempted to map how the sense of touch works and how a simple stroke of the skin can alter an individual's health and behavior. **Dr. Rolf developed a way of using touch to dramatically alter a person's body/life in the field of gravity and passed this knowledge on to others.**



Tension In order to appreciate the full possibility of either Rolwing SI or massage, one must understand tension. Tension is not necessarily bad because, either consciously or unconsciously, it can send warning signals that something is amiss. However, tension keeps feelings and sensations at bay. Understanding its limiting effect, and how to counteract it, is essential in massaging your babies and children. There are two fundamental tensions that we carry in our bodies: “structural tension” and “acquired tension.”

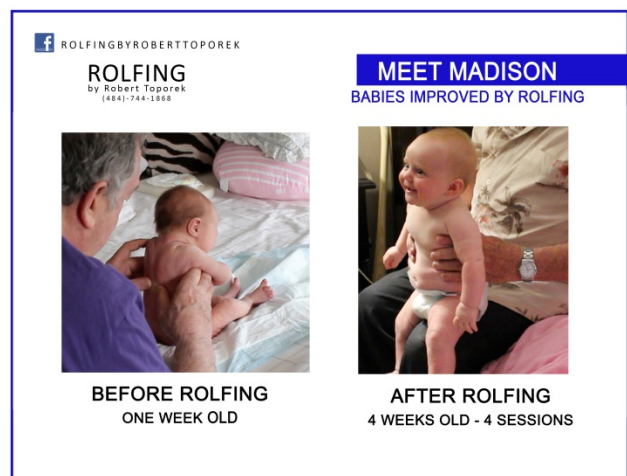
Structural tension is the tensional pattern that literally shapes how we stand, walk, sit, move, express ourselves, and experience our lives. These patterns are genetic and specific to our family background. In fact, as we grow older, people may remark that we stand or walk just like our parents do. If you can recognize a structural similarity between yourself and your parent(s), you may soon be able to recognize it in your own child.

Acquired tension comes as a result of our experiences in life—both the physical and emotional challenges we inevitably face. Our bodies respond to stress and trauma by tightening, shortening, and/or contracting muscles. Over time, these instinctual muscular reactions to stressful situations turn into the tension and the inflexibility that can cause greater problems. Moreover, as we age, these responses become more firmly ingrained and more difficult to reverse. Thus the adage you cannot teach old dog new tricks.

Life presents many forms of stress to all of us, and the best thing we can do for our children is to prepare them for it. Our first trauma is birth itself. Even though there have been tremendous advances in the facility of the birth process, such as having fathers in the delivery room and providing a comfortable and cheerful maternity suite, babies still experience shock, loss, and separation from the womb. Their bodies respond to this experience by tightening and shortening, thus initiating a pattern that, unless interrupted, will govern their growth and development.

In short, Rolwing SI/massage is best defense against the damages that can be caused by tension, stress, and life’s traumas over time. Over the years I have found the best time to counteract tension is right from the start. Through Rolwing SI and or massage you will give your child the tools to effectively and positively deal with the stressors of life. In addition, you will be giving them positive messages about their worth and well-being. Rolwing SI/ massage for new born babies is an uncharted field.

Over the many years I have practiced there are about 100 babies that I started either the day of birth or shortly thereafter. The only documentation is the pictures and videos I have collected. Since I am not getting any older it is time to dramatically find a way to expand this knowledge and practice.



The Three Phases of Rolfing A Bigger Context for the Ten Series

By Robert Toporek, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

ABSTRACT: The author presents a viewpoint of the Ten Series as one phase in an ongoing project of Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI), including advanced Rolfing work and ongoing maintenance. He discusses this from the context of his history with Ida Rolf through to his dedication to working with families multigenerationally with Rolfing SI.

Introduction

I was asked to write an article about the Ten Series. One thing I learned from studies with Dr. Rolf and her son Dick Demmerle is that the Ten Series is not ten sessions, but one session broken into ten hours. Similarly, in my mind, there is no such thing as the Ten Series separate from a bigger picture of the three phases of structural integration (SI) – Ten Series, advanced work, and ongoing work – as a lifelong process that I call the three phases of SI. I came to the distinction of the three phases after working with Dr. Rolf and working on people for many years after the first fourteen (basic plus advanced) sessions, which I will discuss below. This is one of the ways I am framing a “bigger context” for the Ten Series. The other element of that bigger context is the evolutionary view that Rolf took, and that I learned through direct contact with the founder. This is where I will begin my story, but as you will see, the larger evolutionary context is intimately tied to our work of Rolfing being, ideally, a lifelong process for the individual, as well as a multigenerational endeavor through families, groups, and ultimately communities.

Dr. Rolf viewed her work in an evolutionary context, although one has to dig through her writings to see that. Her incredible body of work landed in a culture that was not capable of thinking deeply about the relationship of structure and function in the gravitational field. While branding her work as “Rolfing® SI” made her philosophy more accessible to the general population, I believe that we lost the essence along the way.

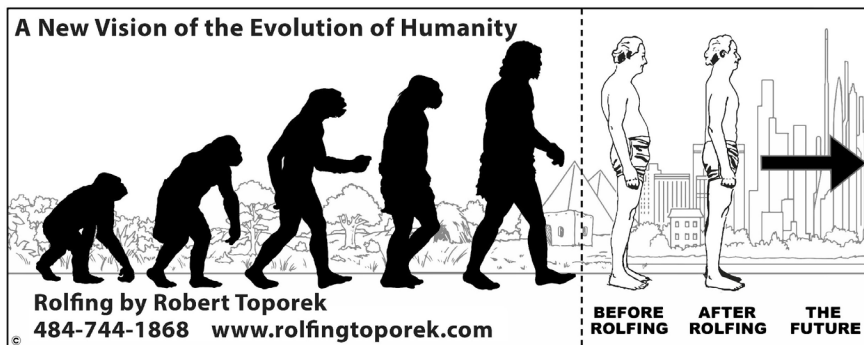
The Ten Series is less a program of discrete goals and more part of a process of optimizing the human being through the bigger three-phase context of SI. Dr. Rolf always said the whole was bigger than the sum of its parts. As she noted in a late piece of writing, “The Vertical – Experiential Side to Human Potential” (Rolf 1977), “I as an individual, am not primarily interested in the relief of symptoms, either physical or mental... I am interested in human potential, and human potential per se neither includes nor excludes the palliation of symptoms....”

Ultimately, she was not interested in just seeing how Rolfing SI could make people stand up straighter or feel better; she wanted to see how it could affect the behavior of a group. She also wanted to assess the importance of demonstrating, documenting, and promoting the benefits of Rolfing SI for babies and children. Toward the end of her life, she indicated that work with babies and a child was the most important direction of her work, and I have taken on that mission as my own life’s work, as I have discussed in an earlier article (Toporek 2017).

The Evolutionary Perspective

Dr. Rolf was a behaviorist and was a leader in the field of human potential giants. She saw her work in the context of how it would affect the behavior of a structure and how that translated in life. She noted that “we assume that human beings are, as a species, evolving toward verticality” (Rolf 1977) and argued that Rolfing SI was a conscious attempt at evolving an individual evolution.

I struggled with this for quite some time until I had the opportunity to do Rolfing SI with Raymond Dart, the South African physical anthropologist and paleontologist who discovered the link between humans and apes through his discoveries of fossil hominins that led to significant insights into human evolution. He observed me doing Rolfing sessions on a number of children, and we had lengthy and important discussions about the evolution of verticality. He pointed out to me that as verticality evolved, the shape of the head changed, and so did the growth and development of the brain. This evolution also reflected itself in the growth and development of humanity. I struggled with this idea, because when humans showed up on the typical chart that was the end of the chart. I have now created a new chart that creates a future for us to think about and ponder.



From the moment we are conceived, patterns of tension from generations before us begin to shape our bodies and lives, flexors over power extensors. We become self-protecting human beings. Our bodies respond to stress, tension, and trauma by contracting back to an old pattern of self-protection. There is no separation between mind and body. Our bodies show up in our lives, our lives show up in our bodies. All the trials and tribulations of our lives begin to take hold and over time our physical and emotional flexibility begins to become more and more constrained.

New times they say require new remedies. New times also demand and consequently receive new forms, new ideas, perhaps a new person. One of the pregnant ideas of this decade is that human behavior is basically an outward and visible functional response of structural organization or the lack there of.

So many therapists are striking at the pattern of disease instead of supporting the pattern of health. Rolfers are not practitioners curing disease; they are specialists in health. They are giving their attention to the better working of people’s minds and bodies.

The Rolfing Process

Let's begin to examine what Dr. Rolf was talking about in broad terms, looking to her article "Postural Release: An Exploration in Structural Dynamics" (Rolf 1960/2001).

Under the name of *Structural Dynamics*, and its implementing manipulative technique, Postural Release, a significant area of human experience is being explored. Subjectively speaking, it is a study in awareness. Objectively, its outline was delineated by Cuvier in 1821: His description, however, referred specifically to paleontology.

"Every organized being forms a whole, a unique and closed system, of which all parts mutually correspond and cooperate by reciprocal action for the same definite end. None of these parts can change without the others changing also; consequently, each of them taken separately represents and postulates all the others." [Cuvier: *Recherches sur les Ossements Fossiles*] Cuvier enunciated this "correlation principle" with reference to the boney, or hard, constituents of biological organizations. The hypothesis seems to be all embracing; however, when expanded, it is found to apply quite as appropriately to the living human, functioning as a physical chemical physiological psychological whole.

Within this framework, Structural Dynamics may be defined as an objective study of such reciprocal action in the individual man; as an objective study within that very broad part of man's consciousness of himself which he has called by abstraction "posture."

To quote Dr. Rolf (1977) further: To what extent could Rolfers create a small population that is able to live within the gravity field without an everlasting war and the constant expenditure of precious human energy? If we could create such a population, what would be its characteristics? I am not interested solely in physical structure, although that is really of basic importance especially in terms of physiological well-being. What will be the psychological characteristics of the individual and of a group composed of such individuals? How would these more vertical individuals compare with the random, less conscious humans who tread the surface of the earth today?



It is perhaps too far-fetched to wonder whether one of the taproots of human aggression and its underlying fear may be the continuous sense of insecurity which random humans unconsciously feel with reference to their environment — the gravity field. This emotional response is called forth very early in life, probably with the first attempt at verticality and certainly with the first walking steps. Many psychological and behavioral aberrations arise from causes less basic than this.

Be that as it may, I see no means of gaining an answer to this suggestive and really important question in the abstract. The answer will come when we can create such a population and observe it through a long-term period. At this point, we are justified only in looking with satisfaction at the reports coming in from people who have experienced some approach to the integrating vertical. The appropriate integration of the bodies of man in the gravity field is a long-term evolutionary project. Not even the first page has been turned yet. It is possible that we are seeing the first conscious attempt at evolution that any species has ever evidenced.

Here we see that Dr. Rolf was already correlating “posture” or structure with broader categories of the living human experience.

Dr. Rolf said the balance in our bodies’ relation to gravity is reflected in behavior states since self-expression is intimately involved with muscular tone. Balance is a resting state, a capacity and preparedness of all responses depending on the nature of the stimulus. Imbalance then is the response or impulse to respond that when it completes itself returns to balance. However, many responses never do complete themselves; therefore our bodies and lives remain in what is called patterns and habits. What is even more profound: we do not start off balanced to begin with. From the moment of conception we develop self-protection flexors over power extensors. As we come out of the womb, unless interrupted, this pattern persists.

One of the brilliant aspects of Dr. Rolf was her vision of the importance of beginning Rolfing as early as possible.

My Evolving Journey

My path to here has not been a straight line. In May of 1966, during my second tour in Vietnam, I became the noncommissioned officer in charge of our battalions’ civil affairs program. My team was a group of wounded soldiers. In the refugee village surrounding our base camp, we built schools, a playground, and a Boy Scout lodge, a health clinic manned once a week by volunteer army doctors and a nurse, took kids weekly to a volunteer Army dentist, and fed an orphanage on a weekly basis. After Vietnam in 1971, the Ford Foundation awarded me a fellowship to study the relationship of methods and techniques to personal growth and public education. This gave me my route to the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, where I met Dr. Rolf and became enamored. Through my examination of myself through programs like Gestalt, encounter groups, massage, acupuncture, Silva Mind Control, Lifespring, Insight, Erhard Seminars Training, and now Landmark Worldwide, I can honestly say that nothing comes close to producing results like pure Rolfing.

I have only studied Rolfing with Dr. Rolf and her son, Dick Demmerle. I shared my story of becoming a Rolfer in an earlier article (Toporek 2017). After my training, I apprenticed with Demmerle over three years, being supervised in “phase one” (Ten Series) work, watching him in his methods, and talking to him constantly about our work. I became Rolf’s administrative assistant and helped her promote Rolfing SI for four years. In December 1977, she asked me to implement and manage The Children’s Project. After that, I hosted and managed her final Advanced Training at my house in Philadelphia. That has led to a bigger project where we use the distinctions of Rolfing/Posture in a program that blends high tech with high touch under the non-profit umbrella www.teamchildren.org www.handsonparenting.org

So, here are my two cents about Rolfing SI. I took Rolf’s evolutionary perspective and social experiment to heart. Since 1975, over 4,500 men, women and children have benefitted by my Rolfing them. Each client is either and or photographed and video taped. In addition they fill out forms with drawings of themselves before session one and after follow-up visits. Over 300 families, from newborn babies and spanning four generations have worked with me.

The Children's Project has now evolved into a bigger project called TeamChildren.org, where we are **combining high touch with high tech**. We have Rolfed over 300 babies, children, and their parents, and are following them through their lives. We are raising money for a pilot Rolfing/massage research and training project with low-income families that have received computers from us and have children with developmental challenges.



The Bigger Context for Life-Long Rolfing

Besides Rolf, I have been influenced by Wilhelm Reich, an extraordinary man who was able to step outside of his culture and examine it with innocent eyes. In the forward to Reich’s book, *Children of the Future*, William Steig wrote:

Angels at birth, we become lost souls. And so it has been forever so long, as we learn from reading the ancients. How does this happen? Why do we humans, in many ways the most intelligent of all animals, fail to realize what every dog, or whale, or mouse spontaneously knows — that he is part of nature and must cooperate with it, obey its laws? Why are we estranged from life? What is wrong with us, with our way of rearing our children?

Through Rolfing babies, children, and families since 1975, documenting them photographically and through video, I discovered that Rolfing SI changes more than the body; it changes an individual’s relationship to his/her life **and allows one to let go in mind and body the constraints of the past.**

Three Phases of Rolfing/SI

This takes me to my discussion of the three phases of SI, or the broader process that holds the Ten Series as but one element.

In my view and practice there are three phases of Rolfing SI. The Ten Series is what I call “phase one”. I call it that because I don’t consider it an end. Neither did Rolf, who created a four-session Advanced Series with further goals of integration, which I consider “phase two”. The position I take for additional work beyond that – “**phase three**” – is twofold: 1) if you do work on someone after the initial Basic and Advanced sessions, you are working on an already integrated body, so any further work goes to forward the previous sessions, and 2) **there is no such thing as a perfectly integrated person.**

Phase One: The Initial Ten Series — Defying Gravity

The first phase in my schema, commonly called the Ten Series, is actually one session broken into ten parts, as I was taught by Rolf and Demmerle. The goal is to begin to integrate a person’s body around the vertical line. Being balanced, aligned, and integrated around a vertical line in the field of gravity actually begins in the final thing we do at the end of the tenth session.

The old adage your ankle bone is connected to you knee bone has never been more profound. All the parts of our body are connected. **The first phase addresses the beginning steps of creating an integrated new posture.** According to Rolf (1960), “The tendency of the body to forward its own vital spontaneous rehabilitation is nowhere more evident than during the progression of a postural release. Standard procedure in this methodology calls for a series consisting of ten hours of manipulative organization. Actually, however, impressive contour changes are evident in the intervals between individual hours of processing, as well as in the more extensive changes seen as a result of the ten-hour sequence considered as a whole.” **Picture to the right is Gordie Howe after 14 sessions**



In overview, the first seven sessions of the ten-session series free the major segments of the body. Sessions eight and nine are balancing sessions that focus on the lower and upper body. However, not until the very last thing in the 10th session does true integration begin. Following a lead from Joe Heller, the first President of The Rolf Institute, I began relating sessions to areas of life. In each session, there is a conversation that can happen that supports the client in freeing his or her potential. These conversations have major implication for life and can be used throughout one’s life, relationships or projects.

Session One: relates to letting go and enjoying the ride of life. As humans, we are born into a structure where flexors have overpowered extensors. Our tendency to hold things in is far greater than our tendency to be open and free. First, I concentrate on freeing the diaphragm from the abdomen, then the shoulders from the rib cage, then lengthening the hamstrings, and a little more work on the abdomen begins to prepare it for the fifth session. I work on the neck, having the client sit up with their knees in, with their fingers laced around their knees, and I lengthen their extensor muscles on their back. **Finally, a great pelvic lift.**

Session Two: relates to taking a stand — concentrates on balancing the feet and legs, while about half of the session concentrates on bench work, freeing the back more. There is more neck work, a pelvic lift, and the question of where the client is not standing up for himself or herself in his or her body and life, where he or she is not stepping up and stepping out.

Session Three: relates to moving in a new direction, involves the client lying on his or her side to free the lateral line from the hips to the shoulder. There's more neck and back work. The conversation goes like this: "By the time your tenth session happens, suppose your body and life begin to move in a new direction, what needs to change? Each human being is essentially a bigger, older version of how he or she has always been. By the time you were three, you perfected the internal conversation of 'I'm not going to, you can't make me.' Letting go of that attitude makes the work so much easier."

Session Four: relates to vitality — freeing the pelvis from below. The client lies on his or her side, and I start at the feet and work up to the pelvis to lengthen the inner line of the leg. People — whether aware of it or not — hold all sorts of memories in the groin region, and the last thing they want is some strange person working anywhere close to their genitals, so context is important, as well as appropriate boundaries both physical and otherwise. The way I frame the session is in a conversation about vitality. From the time most of us have entered school, our vitality has been zapped out of us. We are told not to be too loud or too happy. This session begins to give our clients a new relationship with being alive.

Session Five: relates to power and confidence, involves the abdomen and lower back and increases power and confidence. All human beings become self-protected from conception. We still live as though lions are coming to eat us. In many cases, nasty stuff has happened to people, and they are justified in being cautious. This is the session to have a conversation about finding a new sense of power and confidence. The session concentrates on the lower back by working through the abdomen and the psoas muscle. The **psoas** is a deep-seated core **muscle** connecting the lumbar vertebrae to the femur.



The **psoas major** is the biggest and strongest player in a group of **muscles** called the hip flexors: together they contract to pull the thigh and the torso toward each other.

Session Six: relates to extending yourself, works the extensor muscles. Unless I begin Rolfing work on someone at birth or within the first few weeks of life, the general pattern of flexors overpowering extensors has begun to reinforce itself both physically as well as psychologically. The conversation for this session asks, “How would you be different if you really extended yourself in your relationships, your career, and in your life?”



Session Seven: relates to a new perspective, works with the head and neck.

The world exists the way we see ourselves. This session puts the client’s head on top of his or her shoulders — often for the first time in life — and alters the way he or she sees himself or herself. As you see yourself, so you are. So, the question becomes, “What if you could invent a new view of yourself?” At the end of the session, I have the client sit on the table with his or her knees in front of him or her with his or her fingers laced around the knees; I begin back work, having the client lengthen his or her spine from the top of his or her head. This balances the head on top of the shoulders, and the head and neck begin to lengthen.

Session Eight: relates to balance. I usually work on the lower body and balance everything I have done up to that point to begin bringing it together. Rolf believed that balance in our bodies and our bodies’ relationship to gravity is reflected in behavior states. Balance is a resting state, a capacity and preparedness to respond appropriately and efficiently to a wide variety of stimuli. Imbalance then is the response or impulse to respond, which when it completes itself returns to balance. However, many responses never do complete themselves. What’s even more notable is that we do not start off life structurally balanced. Session eight begins to balance the lower body.

Session Nine: relates to reaching out, works on balancing the upper body, with a further freeing of the arms and shoulders. This relates to reaching out and touching someone. Oftentimes when we have reached out and been rejected, the next time we will reach out a little less, until at some point we can barely raise our hand to ask a question or make a statement.

Session Ten: Real Structural Integration in your body and life begins. Both Dr. Rolf and Demmerle emphasized anything you miss in an earlier session will be your karma in session ten. We begin integrating each body part beginning with the feet and work up, legs, thighs, abdomen, chest, and shoulders. After working on the head and neck and doing a pelvic lift, I have the client sit on the floor with their knees up and fingers laced around the knees and work on their back, starting just below the neck, while they lengthen their spine from the top of their head. In a moment, all of the work begins to come together. The distinction is: to have a new posture, one has to let go of the old one. A definition I use for “posture” is *the position or attitude of your mind and body about yourself or your life.* I then acknowledge the joy in working with the client, find out if there is anything they are incomplete with, and say goodbye.



The picture on the preceding page is of Justin Speeding, who volunteered at Teamchildren.org – an IRS approved nonprofit organization that is an outgrowth of our original project to document, demonstrate and promote the benefits of Rolfing babies and children in 1978. Through combining high tech with high touch we distribute low cost refurbished computers to economically challenged families, schools and organizations. Oftentimes we offer volunteers either free or reduced-price Rolfing sessions. Justin has Asperger’s syndrome, and when he first began volunteering, had poor social and self-communication skills and a weak self-image. Through our mentoring him and offering him Rolfing sessions and scholarships to programs offered by www.landmarkworldwide.com, over the next six years he blossomed. He finished college, and now has a really great job in the field of technology. We have hundreds of other success stories like this, where we have brought the benefits of Rolfing to people and places it was not yet going to.

Phase Two: The Advanced Rolfing Series – Your Posture in the World

The second phase of SI in my schema is Advanced Rolfing. In the original Advanced Series formulated by Rolf, it was another four sessions. Rolf recommended waiting nine months to a year before starting the advanced work, but there are always exceptions to the rule. The distinctions I learned from Rolf and Demmerle are that these four sessions, compared to the Ten Series, concentrate on a deeper level of balancing joints and impacting the nervous system. Rolf designed these four sessions to concentrate on the major joints in the body, such as ankles, knees, hips, wrists, elbows, shoulders, abdomen, lower back, the head, and neck.

Again, you think of it as one session broken into four parts, with the focus being one’s posture in the world. If you examine enough “before” photos, you will see that the posture most people have in relation to the world is “Who am I to make a difference in the world?” It could be interpreted as a posture of cynicism and resignation.

Session Eleven: Your stance in the world. Concentration on ankles, knees, and hips.

Session Twelve: Reaching out in the world to make a difference. Concentrates on the wrists, elbows, and shoulders.

Session Thirteen: Your power in the world. Treats the abdomen and lower back.

Session Fourteen: How to realize your vision in the world. Concentrates on the head and neck.

If I have taken a client through these fourteen sessions total of phase one and phase two, I am leaving that person with a body that is well-balanced and integrated in the field of gravity. Any further work is done from this foundation, looking to see how I can take the integration to an even further level.

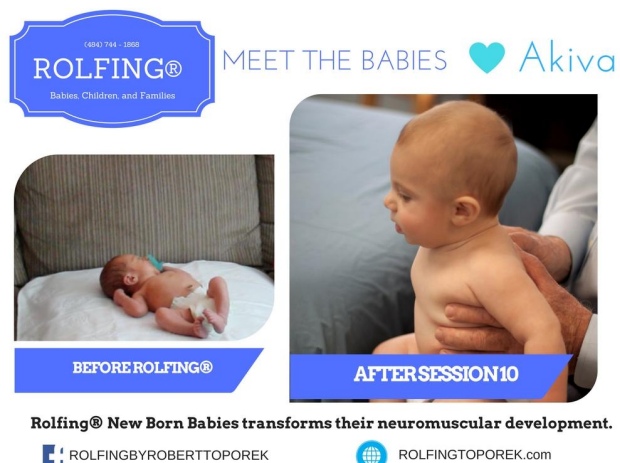
Phase Three: Maintaining Your Spaceship – Ongoing Transformation

After the Ten Series and Advanced Series are completed, it is recommended that clients have a session once or twice a year or whenever they feel a need. Rolf talked about ongoing maintenance, but as I view this work as part of an overall process of lifelong SI, I have named it “phase three”.

Here’s a metaphor for looking at the three phases overall. The first phase is like launching a rocket. The second phase is putting it into orbit. (People who have done the Advanced Series often take on bigger missions in life and make a bigger difference for others.) Phase three is the maintenance: out in space, your vehicle runs into space debris from time to time, and if you do not maintain it, it will soon fall back to earth.

Further Considerations

Working with infants, I find that structural patterns can be dramatically altered in the first few months, especially if the parents have been through Rolfing SI. In these cases, the Advanced Series is appropriate within nine months to a year later. I am always working on a structurally integrated body. I can get more done with these kids as they age than an older client who has patterns deeply ingrained not only in their soft tissue, but in their skeletal structure as well.



Doing phase-three work on adults is another conversation. Even having benefited from Basic and Advanced work, many adults come into phase-three work facing life challenges, accidents, emotional traumas, or diseases like cancer. Nonetheless, true believers welcome the occasional session to propel them both in their bodies and in their lives. For example, a friend of mine had both his hips replaced and underwent shoulder surgery. Afterward, he was acutely aware of how imbalanced that left his body. We did an additional couple of sessions, and he is now sailing away with a balanced body once again.

Current Work

In 1978, Rolf and I held an event to recruit children to receive Rolfing work in The Children’s Project. In talking to the parents, Rolf noted that Rolfing SI provides children with a good foundation to stand and grow up from, namely a balanced, supportive physical body.

Robert Toporek and Ida Rolf in The Children’s Project, circa 1978.



This is where it all began, and it is the genesis of my commitment to working with babies and children as well as multigenerationally with families. (I “walked my talk” with my own family by working on them, both my parents and sister, and my children.) Most of my clients who do the Ten Series are familiar with the illustrations and philosophy in this article, and they have had their children or parents also receive Rolfing SI.

I am currently working with a woman whose parents also saw me for Rolfing SI about forty years ago. I am also doing Rolfing SI for her twenty-two-year-old son. Similarly, I am working on a man whose wife has been after him to get Rolfing SI for thirty-eight years. I am getting ready to do the phase-two series on a one-year-old baby who started his first session at two days old. His older brother started when he was six days old and has now had fifteen sessions. Their mother and father have had sessions beyond session fourteen, and their aunts, uncles, and grandparents have also received Rolfing SI. And I am doing Rolfing SI for a chiropractor and her three children (she has five-year-old twins, one of whom was severely brain-injured from birth).



Additionally, I have taken this work to one of the worst “drug neighborhoods” in Philadelphia over a period of years, informally called the Badlands of North Philadelphia. From my point of view, the most important work before us is to find groups of people to work with, document the results, and find a way to follow up, and promote the benefits in behavior as well as structure.

Going further, we have to bring this work to people and places it is now not going – minority communities, kids and families with developmental challenges, kids with autism and cerebral palsy. Street corner Rolfing in what was formerly called The Badlands of North Philadelphia



When we become scientifically significant, we will be on a new path to healing the world. Dr. Rolf’s work is a gift to be given to as many people as possible as soon as possible.

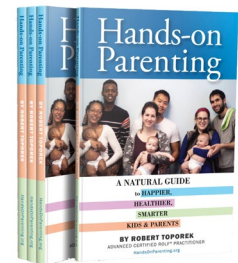


In conclusion, here are some comments from Dr. Rolf (1979) that you may not have read:

As Rolfers, we know that through a combination of manipulation and particularly of education in the understanding use of one's body and its movements, we can bring any person to a more nearly vertical stance. It is because of the unique chemical and physical properties of collagen that we are able to

bring mankind toward the vertical. At this position of verticality, gravitational forces reinforce him, because at the surface of the earth, gravity acts as a set of vertical lines. **Gravity no longer tears them down or pulls them apart. Then the client says, "I feel good. I feel wonderful. What have you done to me?" But it is not we who have created this well-being, it is gravity.**

Robert Toporek studied directly with Dr. Ida P. Rolf the last four years of her life and apprenticed with her son, Richard Demmerle. He managed all of Dr. Rolf's final classes, and in January 1978 provided Dr. Rolf with the opportunity to establish the validity of Rolfing SI for babies and children by starting The Children's Project at Rolf's behest with the support of his housemates and friends in Philadelphia. Since that time, Robert has continued to expand working with babies, children, and entire families, providing and documenting Rolfing SI for over 300 families. He began Rolfing SI for his son Bryan on the first day of his life. Robert is also a decorated Vietnam veteran, the author of Hands-On Parenting: A Natural Guide to Happier, Healthier Babies, Children and Parents, and is a nonprofit leader blending high touch with high tech.



References

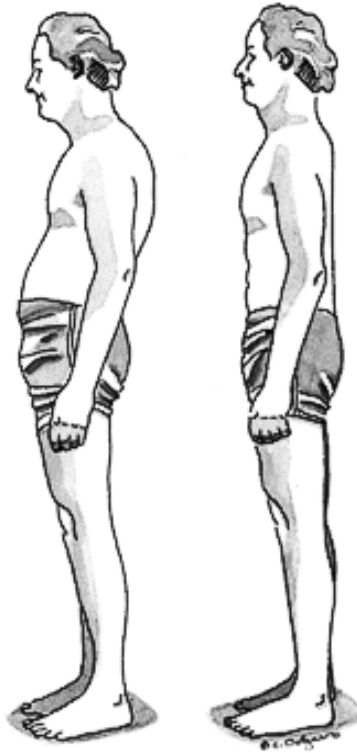
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Rolfing Babies & Children Introduction

Dr. Rolf, the originator of Rolfing, worked with many children in her lifetime and all of them exhibited some abnormality. She saw curved backs, crooked legs, protruding bellies, and heads tilted forward. Dr. Rolf knew that the structural imbalance in early life was the basis for such adult complaints as chronic backache, neck pain, and other manifestations of physical and emotional stress.

In Dr. Rolf's view, stress is caused by imbalance: when there is imbalance, the structural support components of the body operate inefficiently and with unnatural strain. This strain causes more than aches and pains; it also accelerates aging, the wear and tear of the body through time. Imbalance saps physical and emotional energy and reduces one's sense of well-being.

Physical injury, emotional trauma, and/or poor posture cause many people's bodies to become inefficiently organized. Over time, patterns of muscular misuse become deeply ingrained within the connective tissue. This serves to "lock" the body into a structural misalignment that either perpetuates old symptoms or leads to new ones-or both.

Dr. Rolf realized that a child's posture is more than an aesthetic concern; it is a visible indication of how the connective tissue is molding itself into its unique pattern of muscular use or misuse.

In her teachings, Dr. Rolf emphasized that all behavior, physical or emotional, is expressed through the musculoskeletal system. Our vital organs function "in the grip" of the musculoskeletal system. Our emotional state is also expressed through it. We are all familiar with the stooped shoulders that signal self-defeat, the bowed head of shame or embarrassment, the physical tension of anger or fear. Dr. Rolf believed that to change structure was to change function, and she demonstrated this in her work. In other words, to a great extent, our structure determines our behavior.

Proper posture in a healthy organism, Dr. Rolf explained, might be thought of as a "resting state, a capacity and a preparedness to respond appropriately and efficiently to a wide variety of stimuli." When a human body is organized symmetrically around a vertical line, it can cope more efficiently with the force that gravity exerts. That is, the vertically integrated body can make use of gravity to enhance balance as it performs its countless routine tasks. Here gravity becomes, in effect, a supportive force rather than a destructive one.

Dr. Rolf knew that Rolfing benefited children. She also understood the necessity of documenting the changes in these children: how they looked, how they felt, and how their lives had been affected-and not just immediately after the standard series of sessions, but after a year or more had passed, as well.

"We are not truly upright, we are only on our way to becoming upright. This is a metaphysical consideration. One of the jobs of a Rolfer is to speed that process along. We want to get them into the place where gravity reinforces them and is a friend, a nourishing force." ~ Dr. Ida P. Rolf



Why Rolf Babies/Children?

The purpose of Rolfing is to better balance an individual's body around a vertical line in the field of gravity so that gravity can support the body rather than tear it down. The result of this better balance is an enhancement not only of physical well-being, but also of emotional and spiritual well-being.

Socrates said, "Know thyself." We must know ourselves in order that we might know the world because the world begins in ourselves. It cannot be overestimated how important it is to children to understand this concept. Their lives are just beginning to unfold. We forget that childhood is charged with concerns and traumas which the adult has survived and can only dimly recall, or perhaps has suppressed completely.

Control, confidence, and understanding of how one's body truly works-its limits and its strengths, a trust in its essential fluidity and resilience-there are the aspects which give us confidence about the operation of the one organism we are closest to-our individual selves.

Rolfing children address these concerns at an early age to give children ease with their own bodies and to allow them to develop the confidence that they carry their own state of grace within them. There is no way to separate the physical child from his mental and spiritual self. A child who slumps mentally and emotionally. Conversely, a child whose body is balanced and 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 which are not otherwise being communicated. Parental concern is to produce a balanced child. Rolfing is an immediately effective means of addressing this objective.



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

In order to understand Rolfing, it is important to consider the nature of fascia. The word fascia comes from Latin and means "bands." Fascia forms a continuous network throughout every part of the body. This cross-section of the thigh (below) shows the fascia surrounding the femur. Notice how the fascia also surrounds the muscular tissue which is represented in the drawing by the large shaded areas. 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 envelope each primary bundle of muscle fibers, and to ligaments, vessels, nerves, bursae, lymph nodes, viscera, joints, and cartilage. In the limbs, it thickens and serves to hold the tendons in place when the muscles contract. 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.

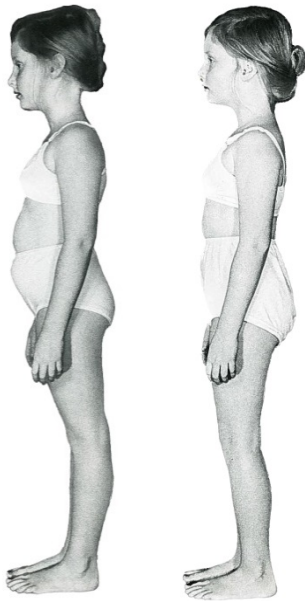
Consider the example of a child who falls on his knee. Though this is not a serious injury, it causes pain for several days. To ease the discomfort, the child favors the leg. Neighboring muscle groups are used to support the changed pattern of weight bearing. The fascia in the distressed areas thickens or sticks together to support the increased load on these muscles.

A lifetime of such bumps and knocks causes a body to lose its vertical alignment and natural grace. Rolfing can transform this at any age. The sooner one begins the longer they enjoy the benefits



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 the 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.

The average person of any age suffers from aches, stiffness, and musculoskeletal imbalance, and the amount of discomfort increases and he or she ages. We maintain, however, that the key factor here is not so much age as the force of gravity. We know that this force which operates to press down on the body can be used to support it as well.



Imagine the body as a stack of segmented blocks: head, shoulders, thorax, pelvis, and legs. When these blocks are aligned correctly, a straight line can be drawn, beginning from the top of the head, which will touch the ear, shoulder, pelvis, leg, and ankle. In this optimal vertical alignment, gravity will work to support the body. This is because the weight of each block is close to a common, central (vertical) axis. Hence, each block “rests” on the one below it. In such a “resting” state, far less energy is needed to support and to move the whole set of blocks.

In a body that is out of alignment, each of the blocks does not rest on the one below it. For example, for a person who habitually hangs his head, the force of gravity pushes down on the head. If it weren't for the muscles in the back of the neck that initially compensate for this condition, the person would always look as if he is about to fall over.

People expend a great deal of extra energy to deal with such imbalance. The purpose of Rolfing is to correct physical imbalance so that the body blocks are automatically aligned within the field of gravity. When this is accomplished, the person has increased energy available for use in more creative and joyful ways.

“Standing squarely on your own two feet,” “having your feet planted firmly on the ground,”

“having your head on straight,” and “feeling supported by gravity” are not just clichés to us. They are the objectives of our professional efforts with our clients.

And, especially when these clients are children, there is often observed in them a thrilling realization that at last, and perhaps for the very first time, they understand what straight means and is, as they being to assert control over their bodies and their lives.

