

Thousands Improve Health and Self-Esteem by "Perfecting" Their Posture

by Elizabeth Eichler

We're all aging. From newborn babies to centenarians, every day we get older and older. Parts begin to wear out. "Healthier eating habits." "Regular exercise." We all know the prescription. Right? How about improved posture as a solution?

According to Robert Toporek, founder/president of Posture Perfect, good posture is an integral part of life. Whether it is caused by a physical trauma or simply inherited from our parents, poor posture is an indication that our bodies are out of alignment. By getting corrective treatment -- a "body lift," so to speak -- we can improve our performance at work, at school, in our love lives, and in our daily relationships.

Business men and women looking for ways to stay young, despite daily stresses ... parents concerned over their children's slouching ... aging people not willing to put up with chronic aches and pains ... new mothers who need help reclaiming their bodies ... these are just a few of the many people who have tried Posture Perfect, and report a tremendous improvement in their looks, health, and well-being.

For the past 15 years, Toporek has "postured" people into a better life. From his Philadelphia-based office, he has released tensions; straightened backs, necks, and bowed legs; and helped transform lives.

"People walk around through life all bunched up, angry, or lacking in self-confidence, and this can all be seen in their bodies. Especially if you start looking at people sideways," says Toporek. "As a result, their bodies become out of alignment, contributing to stress and tension and causing problems such as chronic aches and pains."

"Few people think about how their posture affects them.

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But whether you exercise regularly or never exercised a day in your life, whether you eat health food or 'junk' food, whether you are 90 years old or 9 days, poor posture takes its toll. It shows up as chronic fatigue, aching back or necks, or stiffness associated with old age.

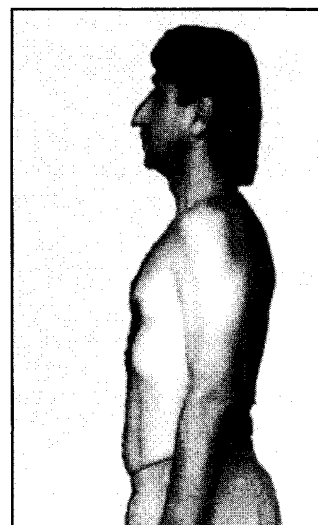
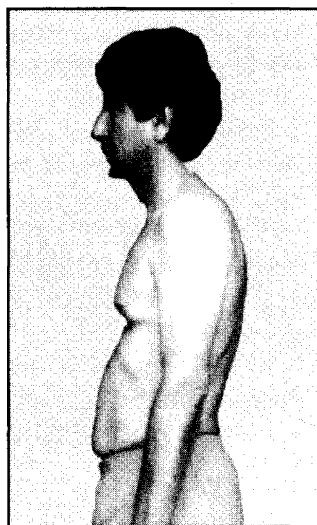
"By working on people's posture," Toporek continues, "we can begin to free their bodies from inherited or stress-induced tendencies and open all sorts of new opportunities for them. They end up standing straighter, feeling better, being more powerful, more confident, more alive, less tense, and more effective."

Reversing the Effects of Life's Trauma

The technique used by Toporek looks simple: with his fingertips he gently stretches the connective bands of tissue, or "fascia," that cover the muscles, bones and organs and support the body. These connective bands, when injured through either emotional or physical trauma, shrink and tighten, limiting the ability to move. It becomes a cycle, slowly pulling the body down.

For example, if a young girl hurts her knee, she may favor that leg for a few days. Her muscle groups must compensate for the changed pattern of how she distributes her weight. The fascia

(Continued)



Robert Toporek, Certified Rolf practitioner.

Before and after photos show the dramatic physical changes that occur as a result of Posture Perfect's ten-session program.



Poor posture can be part of a family inheritance, as seen in these four generations of a single family.

will thicken to support the increased load on the muscles. Over the course of her life, such bumps and bruises can significantly alter the natural grace of that child, slowly forcing the body out of its vertical alignment.

Emotional traumas show up in a person's body, too. People who are often criticized as children respond by tilting their heads forward. They often carry feelings of inadequacy throughout their lives.

"We alter this," Toporek asserts. And he has a library of videotaped evidence to support his claims. He pops in tape after tape of children and adults, who, after ten sessions, finally look like "they have their heads on straight." Their confidence and presence visibly improved.

Changing the Family Tradition

"Poor posture and its consequences can also be handed down from previous generations," Toporek notes. Because people are often motivated to share the technology with loved ones, he has

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had the opportunity to work on various members of individual families.

For Sue McClenathan of Wilmington, DE, Posture Perfect has become a family tradition. She first became interested in Roling after reading about it in a physical therapy newspaper, and felt that it represented a way to improve the development of her son, Kevin, who has cerebral palsy. Eventually, she was directed to Toporek.

After ten sessions, Kevin's mother could see the difference. "He was able to sit better," she reports. "He could sit taller and move more freely. His therapist in Baltimore said that it wasn't hurting, and that Kevin looked better and was walking better."

Since then, Sue has also had sessions with Toporek, and so have her mother and her husband.

Through such work with family members, Toporek has been able to develop and explore the premise that posture is an inherited physical attribute.

"Families fall into patterns," he explains. "Generations follow generations, and people begin to look like their mothers and fathers. This continues until you take action to break the pattern."

Visible Changes After Ten Sessions

Toporek has documented more than 2,500 cases, many on videotape, of how his work has made a physical difference for people of all ages, backgrounds, and physical handicaps. His documentary, "The Promise of Roling Children," was recently a finalist in a competition sponsored by the National Association for Video Producers of Public Access TV. Through videotaped interviews, he illustrates the tremendous change in people's lives, visible not only in how they hold their bodies, but in their faces, and what they say about their personal transformation while taking the ten-session Posture Perfect program.

"When I met Robert, he told me that after the work we were going to do, I wasn't going to recognize myself," says University of Delaware student Mark Mineart. "And I didn't believe him. My face was clouded with tension, I looked like someone had shot my dog. But after the first series...my posture had cleared up. My life is completely different. I am a totally different person. More aware, more alert, more perceptive."

Tapes of Mineart and others provide a convincing record of Toporek's work in transforming the body to a more integrated, balanced structure.

The Roling Concept: Rooted in Eastern Culture

The basic theories of Toporek's work can be found in Eastern cultures, but are emerging slowly in the west. "Posture as a domain doesn't exist for psychology or medicine," he explains. "But people know that when your posture isn't good, you don't look good or feel good. There is a relationship between the body and the mind. In our culture, the appreciation of this connection is just emerging."

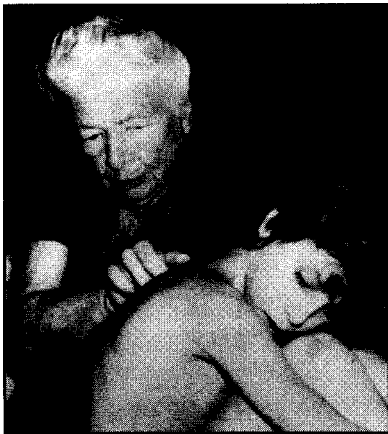
In their book, *Musculoskeletal Manipulation*, Jerome Tobis and Fred Hoshler trace the discovery of the "myofascial genesis of back pain" in Western medicine to 1904, but assert that Eastern medicine has long held a greater understanding of pain.

It wasn't until the 1950s that Dr. Ida P. Rolf created the technology of Structural Integration, commonly called "Roling," which serves as the basis of Toporek's work.

This technology helps balance, align, and integrate the body along a vertical path in such a way that gravity can support the body, rather than tearing it down.

Rolfing Today's Key to Physical Freedom

Toporek, the protege and friend of the late Dr. Rolf, has committed his life to the continuation of her work and research. Prior to spending four years studying with Dr. Rolf, Toporek received a Ford fellowship to study the methods and techniques of personal growth and its relationship to public education.



Dr. Ida P. Rolf, shown with Teddy Goldstein, trained Toporek to work with children as well as adults.

Today, he runs Posture Perfect with programs that build on Dr. Rolf's work, adding the distinctions and benefits of Toporek's own experience and insight.

As both a certified Rolfer and posture therapist, Toporek feels that he can do more than address the symptoms of back pain, aches, pains, stress, and tension. He can help create a more balanced, aligned body.

"That's the essential concept of Dr. Rolf's work," he explains. "A body: aligned, balanced, and integrated." It's also the reason why his practice is focused on correcting the posture. "When the

cause is effectively evaluated and treated, the symptoms are alleviated as a natural consequence."

Toporek has a lifelong commitment to improving people's health and well-being. He is expanding his work with brain-injured children and adults. He has spoken at conferences as large as the National Association for Humanistic Psychology and as

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small as Wilmington's Discovery Pre-school. His work has been the focus of appearances on "Evening Magazine" and "A.M. Philadelphia" as well as numerous radio talk shows and newspaper articles.

This past year, Toporek has taken on the large project of working on a group of people at the University of Delaware's Professional Theater Training Program. There, he is documenting the progress of a group of graduate students ranging in age from 21 to 41.

Acting professor Leslie Reidel notes, "I've noticed that there is a substantial shift in the way they are in class--in the way they are in general. But more than that, they have more self-confidence and a greater degree of expressiveness. They take more risks. This was an ingredient which we never had before in this program, and I attribute a lot of this growth and development to Posture Perfect."

While Posture Perfect contributes to improved health and self-image among adults, it is Toporek's goal to reach people at as young an age as possible.

"If you have bad posture, correct it before it can set in," he advises. "The younger you are, the more time you have to enjoy life, free of those chronic aches and pains associated with poor posture. However, it is never too late." He pops in a cassette of a 79-year-old woman who came to him searching for more freedom of movement. At the time, she could not walk or extend her arm above her shoulder without considerable pain.

In the videotape of her initial interview, she appears hesitant. Her face pinches when she moves her arm or shuffles a few steps with aching knees. After her tenth session, she looks 20 years younger. She speaks with a faster rhythm. She moves her arms freely, as she happily demonstrates.

"You know, it's wonderful not to have those aches and pains that seem to come with age," she says excitedly. "Mr. Toporek has obliterated those aches and pains for me. I've been able to carry on much better than before. And I think I've helped other people and given them the courage to work with Robert to improve their lives."

How Rolfing by Robert works

There are three phases to Posture Perfect. *Phase One* addresses the major segments of the body--first "untying" and individually distinguishing the body parts from one another, and then beginning to build a new structure--balanced, aligned, and integrated.

Each of the ten sessions focuses on a different part of the body and the corresponding issues in life associated with that area. For example, the first session works on the chest and rib cage, the area of life associated with "being alive." After this session, explains Toporek, people often report the ability to breathe more freely. The second session deals with the feet and legs and how they are related to the body--how people stand and use their feet, as well as how they take a stand in life. In session seven, which works the neck and head, people are given not only the opportunity but the *ability* to hold their heads high, experience real confidence, and actually have a new perspective in life.

Phase Two, a four-session program that is recommended nine months to one year later, works on balancing the major joints of the body. "By the time these sessions are completed," reports Toporek, "you have a certain way of being with your body that most people have never experienced."

Phase Three of the Posture Perfect program is an occasional or yearly "tune-up," which helps perpetuate the improved balance that the body has achieved.

"I see many people on a regular basis," says Toporek. "As they get older, their posture continues to improve. Most people would expect aging to have the opposite effect. Posture is not supposed to improve with aging, right? And as their posture improves, so does their energy level and their whole outlook on life. Rather than getting older and older and 'retiring,' they continue to blossom."