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ROLFING: WHAT IS IT AND HOW CAN IT HELP?

YOUR GUIDE TO THE ROLF METHOD OF STRUCTURAL INTEGRATION





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Every engineer knows that the foundations of a house are essential to a strong structure. If you try to build without good foundations, the building won't be stable.

Over time, gravity will find the areas of weakness – putting strain throughout the system until parts of the house start tipping and creaking. Eventually, the walls will begin to crumble down.



This is the same idea behind The Rolf Method of Structural Integration. Without good internal foundations in the body, you are exposing yourself to problems down the line, from limited movement and flexibility, to poor balance, muscle aches and pains. Across 10 sessions – developed by Dr Ida Pauline Rolf more than 50 years ago – the Rolf Method seeks to release, realign and rebalance the whole body, forming a strong internal structure to help you thrive.

The 10 Rolf sessions aim to work the body's fascia – a matrix of connective tissue that surrounds everything within the body: bones, muscles, ligaments, organs, nerves and blood vessels. Fascia 'holds' these elements in place, giving the body structure, which in turn allows the body to function. Without it, you'd effectively be a bag of bones.

By manipulating the fascia through physical touch, these 10 sessions help build a solid, horizontal base in your body that is essential to good movement. After all, if your feet, ankles, pelvis or shoulders are twisted or tilted (whether side to side or forward/backwards), then the rest of your body can never be properly aligned, resulting in poor posture and a lack of stability.



By aligning the body in this way, the sessions help to relieve tension or pain – often held in the lower back, shoulders or neck – while also improving balance and posture. This, in turn, gives the illusion of being taller and slimmer, as your body is able to finally stand upright in a straight line. People often feel lighter and looser, with a greater range of movement, increased flexibility, higher energy levels and better sports performance. Some people even gain height.

While the practice of Structural Integration needs to be conducted with a specialist, there are ways that you can begin to help yourself. When you're sitting at a desk, for instance, try and position yourself so you're sat on your 'sitting bone', while keeping both feet planted on the ground rather than crossing your legs. Spread the weight of your bag across both shoulders, not just the same one all the time. And make sure you get up, walk around and stretch regularly whenever you're sitting for prolonged periods of time.

These may seem like simple, obvious things, but it's remarkable how quickly we forget. Just think of the analogy of the house. It's better to start small and simple – otherwise, before you know it, you might find your walls are starting to crumble down.



A SIMPLE STRUCTURAL INTEGRATION EXERCISE TO TRY

This exercise can be practiced when you're sitting (less intensity) or standing (more intensity). It helps to open up the feet, which we usually force into tight shoes all day. By relieving tension in the feet, we can soften our calves, hamstrings and (often) the back and neck.

1. Take a small ball – a foam golf ball works well (avoid real golf balls as they can be a little too painful)
2. Place the ball under one foot and slowly roll it around – gently and slowly.
3. Whenever you feel a spot that makes you think 'ouch', that's a place that needs help. Stay on that spot and relax into the space, allowing the body and foot to soften further, as if melting over the ball.
4. When that spot feels better, find another point and repeat.

Note: A good way to test the effects of this exercise is to stand and touch your toes before you start. Once you've finished stretching out one foot, try and touch your toes again. You'll probably find that the hand on the side you've worked can drop lower than the side you haven't.