

Technique Spotlight:

# Rolfing® Structural Integration

by Carole LaRochelle, B.C.S.I.

In massage school, students become aware of the various massage and bodywork modalities that exist to effect pain relief, balance and relaxation in clients. Rolfing® Structural Integration is not a technique as much as a three-dimensional inquiry into how our bodies are put together and organized in gravity. I have made Rolfing Structural Integration my life's work for the past 18 years, and there are many reasons why massage students and practicing therapists should invest time and effort to learn this unique system of manual therapy.

## Balance and structure

The origins of Rolfing Structural Integration are not in massage therapy. Rather, this work was developed by biochemist Ida P. Rolf, Ph.D. (1896-1979). She observed that the structure of the human body affected its optimum function, and set out on a lifelong inquiry into how to create structural change in the body. In addition to biochemistry, Rolf's thinking was influenced by her



Sitting back work with the client rolling into a C curve.

practice of yoga; treatments and training from pioneer osteopaths; and several closely related postural training and movement-awareness therapies.

Rolf began working with people in New York, New York, during World War II. By the 1950s, she was traveling the country and teaching her structural integration to chiropractors and osteopaths.

In 1964, Rolf went to the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, to work with psychotherapist Fritz Perls. She began to teach there every summer, and it was during this time when structural integration became known as Rolfing Structural Integration.

By studying Rolfing Structural Integration at The Rolf Institute® of Structural Integration

(www.rolf.org), students will learn how to reshape and reorganize human structure according to clearly defined principles in a systematic and consistent manner. As a Certified Rolfer™, structural inquiry always informs my work. Rolfers look for the underlying structural or functional causes of an issue and work to create deep, permanent structural change.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ROLF INSTITUTE® OF STRUCTURAL INTEGRATION



Opening the pectoral fascia in the first hour.

### A classroom experience

I recently taught at a local massage school, and a student volunteer shared she had chronic pain in her right scapula area. Massage had not relieved her troubles, and she was curious to see if Rolwing Structural Integration could help. As she stood in her underwear in front of the class, we observed her body to see if an underlying structural issue was contributing to the pain in her shoulder.

The first thing I noticed was an asymmetry between the two sides of her pelvis. Palpation revealed one side had an anterior rotation and the other side had a posterior rotation. With my hands on the bony landmarks of her posterior superior iliac spine and anterior superior iliac spine, students in the class were also able to see the pattern.

I then tested to see if there was a motion restriction in her sacroiliac joints and, indeed, we found one side was restricted. Taking our gaze up her spine, we noticed a small side bend. This side bend in her spine resulted in her right

shoulder sitting lower than her left, and a noticeable difference in the curve of her waist between right and left sides.

One of the principles we work with in Rolwing Structural Integration is support. I was curious to see if creating more structural support for her right shoulder would reduce her pain symptom. In this case, creating more structural support meant releasing the stuck sacroiliac joint and getting her innominate bones balanced to create more horizontal support for the spine and rib cage.

After accomplishing these goals and doing some work with the fascial imbalances around the woman's spine, I asked her to stand again. Balance was noticeably restored between the two halves of her pelvis, the sacroiliac joint's motion restriction was resolved, the curves of her waist were more symmetric, and her shoulders sat more evenly on her rib cage. The student reported feeling lighter, more balanced and at ease in her body.

### The silent realm

Writing about Rolwing Structural Integration, or any touch modality, is inherently difficult, because in many ways we work in the silent realm. I hope some basic questions about Rolwing Structural Integration have been answered and you will be inspired to visit a Certified Rolfer to experience firsthand the power of this body of work.

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