

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES

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When your body tells you it needs some help to release pain or tension, should you book an appointment with a massage therapist or a Rolfer?

Rolfing is a hands-on form of manipulating your body's myofascial system to improve posture and movement.

According to the official Rolfing® Structural Integration website (rolf.org), it “works on the connective tissue to release, realign and balance the whole body.” It is most often used to help ease pain and discomfort from chronic back problems, repetitive motion injury, trauma, and joint or muscle difficulties from the normal process of aging.

Rolfing has been practiced for almost 50 years, since its founder, Dr. Ida P. Rolf, PhD created a holis-

HIGH TOUCH TECHNIQUES: ROLFING & MASSAGE

tic system of soft tissue manipulation and movement education. “The pliable fascia that surrounds our muscles and connects them is very elastic when it is healthy and a real concern when it is in a state of imbalance,” says Cori Terry, a Certified Advanced Rolfer based in Kalamazoo. “Using this form of structural integration lengthens adhesions in the fascia, allowing muscle groups to slide more efficiently and easily over one another, so your movements are freer. You don’t feel so stuck.”

Rolfing “structural integration” can help alter a person’s posture, so dancers like Terry often avail themselves of its benefits. “It is helpful for all ages, from children active in sports to those adults who want better performance in their daily activities,” Terry adds. “I had my first experience with Rolfing in New York in the 1970s and it was wonderful, but I didn’t come back to it until 20 years later. Now, the practice and the treatment have helped me open up on so many levels. It works well with my dance career.” In addition to being a Rolfer, she is the director of the popular modern dance troupe Wellspring/Cori Terry and Dancers. She studied at the acclaimed Rolf Institute in Boulder, Colorado. The only other sites for the training are in Brazil and Germany.

Terry says all too often, Rolfing is confused with deep tissue massage. “It is definitely not the same thing,” she stresses. “With Rolfing, I am never just dealing with one tight muscle. Instead I palpate to work with muscle relationships to corresponding body parts and inefficient or incorrect muscular habits. It is a deep touch with the goals and process very different than massage. Dancers and others who are incredibly active are helped by this technique. So are those with structural

issues, like scoliosis or leg length differences, and people who have whiplash and soft tissue damage from car accidents. Getting Rolfed tends to balance and restore the body, so even those who sit at a computer all day can benefit.”

According to Terry, the goal of Rolfing is to change a person’s habits. “It takes a long term commitment to postural changes in the way you move or sit at work or at home,” she notes. “It is a systematic, participatory process toward structural integration, with a basic Rolfing series involving ten visits.”

When it comes to high touch healing, there are also many benefits of general massage techniques for relieving stress, tension and for sheer relaxation. Dana Smoker, a Certified Massage Therapist, Reiki Master and owner of Nature’s Dance in Kalamazoo (naturesdance.us), says relaxation massage is the most popular service she renders. “Our focus is on health, so we also try to educate people while they’re here,” she stresses. “We discuss their goals, and customize their treatment with acupressure and other forms of healing touch to help bring their body into balance.”

Smoker acknowledges that this “balance” can’t be achieved in a one hour session. “It is a process,” she says. “We encourage our clients to consider massage as part of their regular health and wellness routine. Considering the levels of stress in today’s world and the type of fast-paced environment in which we seem to work and live, too many people just go, go, go until they drop. Then they take a pill and go some more.” Numerous studies have shown that chronic stress will take its toll on your mental and physical health.

“One of my goals is to assist people in learning how to relax again and to handle stress better,”

Smoker adds. "Empowering people by teaching breathing and relaxation techniques or exercises to use at work or at home is also important. It's not realistic to expect stress to just disappear without making a few lifestyle changes." From simple reminders such as "drink plenty of water" to scheduling regular massages, Smoker measures her impact on her clients in baby steps.

"It can be an information overload or too overwhelming for most people when they begin researching methods of living well," she explains. "I help them sort out what to do first. Environmental stress can create toxins that affect tissues and joints. Over time, stress can create severe health problems if you can't find ways to release it. I tell people that they do have the power to heal themselves, through prevention. With massage on a regular basis, you can boost your immune system, sleep better and help your body flush out those toxins."

To learn more about stress release through relaxation and massage, you can contact Dana Smoker at 269-324-0795. For Rolfing, contact Cori Terry at 269-373-8808.



ACUPUNCTURE PRACTITIONERS

A type of energetic medicine, dating back some 5,000 years, acupuncture stimulates or blocks qui (or chi - life force) in order to create better balance or control negative forces such as pain or allergic reaction. It is often used to treat addictions, allergies, pain, chronic complaints, mental and emotional problems or symptoms related to diseases.



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