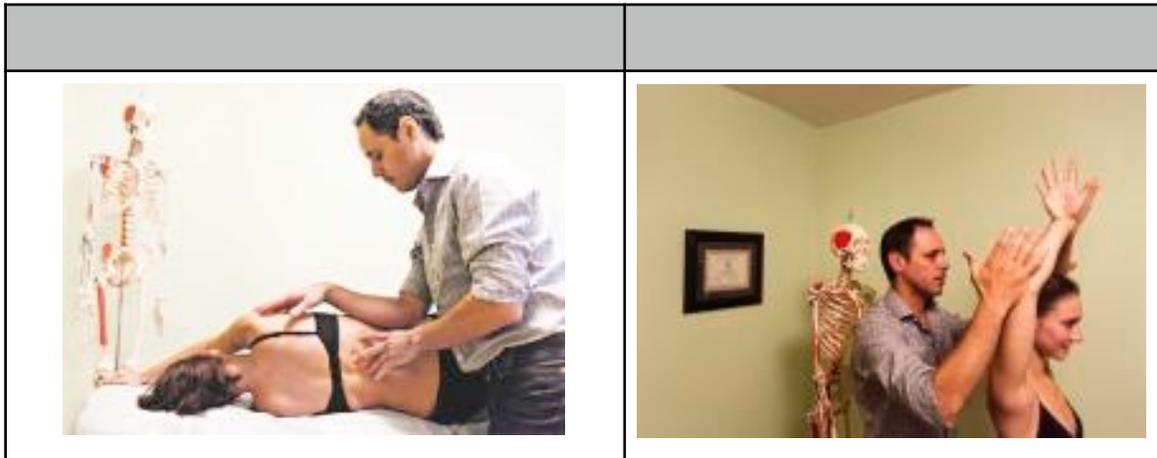


New generation learning the joys, pains of Rolfing®

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By Austin Considine, *The New York Times*



Rey Allen, a Rolfing practitioner, works with Anna Zahn, a former dancer who sought Rolfing® to counter the strain of dancing. Anna Zahn says the treatments are painful but provide great relief. (Piotr Redlinski, *The New York Times*)

A former dancer, Anna Zahn is in touch with her body. To gain more flexibility and to counteract some of the strain from dancing, she has tried a number of remedies: Reiki, acupuncture, yoga.

But she still felt tight, her body tense. So she started getting Rolfed — a kind of deep-tissue bodywork that can be so intense that some jokingly liken it to masochism.

"It's not going to massage and lighting aromatherapy candles," said Zahn, a 20-year-old student at New York University who gets a Rolfing® treatment every week or so. "It's tough to go to these sessions. It's painful, very painful, emotionally and physically. But you feel such a relief when you leave that it's just the most amazing feeling."

Others are feeling it too. Once popular in the 1970s, Rolfing® once evoked hairy-chested, New Age types seeking alternative therapies — perhaps most famously spoofed in the 1977 football movie "Semi- Tough," starring Burt Reynolds and Kris Kristofferson.

But today, Rolfing® is experiencing something of a resurgence, especially among younger city dwellers for whom the novelty of yoga has worn off and who are now seeking more intense ways to relieve the stresses of modern life.

"Back in the day, Rolfing's growth was word of mouth," said Rey Allen, a Rolfing® practitioner in lower Manhattan who has noticed an increase in its popularity. He attributes the rise partly to the Internet, which has introduced the unorthodox treatment to a new generation.

"Over half of my clientele are in their 20s," he added. "Since I opened my practice in the city a few years ago, the average age of my clientele has always been 35. But that has drastically changed since the summer."

Sources: http://www.denverpost.com/fitness/ci_17708511 or <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/07/fashion/07rolfing.html>

Could Rolwing® be one Madonna endorsement away from becoming the next Pilates?

Rolwing® is named after its creator, Dr. Ida Rolf, a biochemist from New York, who studied alternative methods of bodywork and healing beginning in the 1920s. She died in 1979 at the age of 82.

Rolf developed a theory that the body's aches and pains arose from basic imbalances in posture and alignment, which were created and reinforced over time by gravity and learned responses among muscles and fascia — the sheath-like connective tissue that surrounds and binds muscles together. Rolwing® developed as a way to "restructure" muscles and fascia.

The focus on inflamed fascia is part of what distinguishes it from chiropractic, which deals with bones, and from therapeutic massage, which works on muscles.

That also explains why Rolwing® has a reputation for being aggressive, even painful at times. Fascia is stubborn material. Breaking up knots and scar tissue along tendons and ligaments is tough work. Rolfers™ gouge with knuckles and knead with fists, contort limbs and lean into elbows to loosen ligaments. Patients, meanwhile, need the fortitude to relax and take it during the hour-long sessions.

Painful but beneficial

Russell Poses, a 39-year-old international equities trader on Wall Street who started getting Rolwing® treatments after injuring his back, likened the experience to "paying \$150 an hour for Rolwing®." But the benefits, as far as he's concerned, are well worth it. Chiropractors and years of physical therapy couldn't accomplish what two or three Rolwing® sessions did, he said.

Plus, he said he could still feel the results two weeks later. "It's something that actually lasts," he said.

It is hard to find reliable statistics on the prevalence of Rolwing®. But the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration™, which was founded by Rolf in 1971 to educate and certify practitioners, says it has noticed a rise in student enrollments at its Boulder headquarters.

Kevin McCoy, a faculty member at the institute with a practice in Milwaukee, said he had seen annual class sizes swell to 100 from 75 students in recent years. In the mid- 1980s, he said, the school graduated fewer than 50 a year. Despite the bad economy, he said, "our numbers have been maintaining or growing."

A high-profile endorsement on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" in 2007 by the cardiac surgeon Dr. Mehmet Oz certainly didn't hurt. Now the host of his own syndicated daytime program, "The Dr. Oz Show," he says he sees the growing popularity of Rolwing® as "a general perception by the public that taking medications for discomfort is not giving you the panacea benefits that you would desire."

In that regard, he said he viewed the treatment as an extension of practices like yoga, which also offers relief without drugs. "Yoga is in many ways analogous to Rolwing® because it takes tendons and it stretches them into a position of discomfort," Oz said. "They're just doing it for you without your doing it yourself."

Rolwing® practitioners say they also have noticed a shift that may explain why younger clients are seeking out their services. It's not just to treat injuries, but also stress. "Health is one area where we can find a sense of control," said Allen, who has been practicing for about nine years. "The real trend is that people are starting to look within the boundaries of their own skin for meaning in their lives and to find a sense of security in the world."

As with other holistic practices, Rolwing® seems to leave the door open for a certain mysticism. Even those who have little use for New Age- type practices like meditation can verge on the metaphysical when discussing Rolwing®.

Beau Buffier, a 35-year-old partner at a corporate law firm in New York, says he started Rolwing® treatments after he injured his neck and shoulder in a fall. Despite three MRIs, surgery, physical therapy, chiropractic, acupuncture and deep massage, the pain remained. Stress from his high- stakes job didn't help.

But somehow Rolwing® did the trick. "It's dealing with the physical manifestations of something that's kind of emotional or spiritual," Buffier said.

He has since gotten in touch with his body in other ways. He began exercising more and eating better. He lost 20 pounds. His blood pressure dropped.

"It's almost as if your body locks up emotions," he said.

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