

Rolfing gains popularity as pain reliever

Rolfing is back.

The unfortunately named, ultra-deep form of massage, which enjoyed a wave of popularity in the 1970s only to go the way of male chest hair, is everywhere these days.

This year's Academy Award nominees included the short documentary "Two Hands," where concert pianist Leon Fleisher declared that Rolfing and Botox restored his ability to play piano with his right hand.

A recent issue of Vogue magazine featured a story on the tissue-stretching treatment.

Dr. Oz even got Rolfed on Oprah Winfrey's show last month.

Frank Epstein, a Des Moines-area specialist in what is generically known as structural integration, says the number of people checking out his Web site has increased.

"I think there's not a lot of familiarity with it here, as much as there is in some other regions of the country," said Epstein, 52, who works out of his home office in Windsor Heights. "I think if there was more familiarity, there would be more people exploring it."

Des Moines runner Jon Alsip said his first exposure to Rolfing came 20 years ago. A friend's brother, who had a practice in the San Francisco Bay Area, was visiting Des Moines. He treated and released Alsip's frozen shoulder.

Since then, Alsip has been looking for a local practitioner.

He stumbled onto Epstein while he was suffering from chronic knee pain.

"They were in bad, bad shape," said Alsip, 66. "I was thinking I'd have to give up running.

"Frank gave me an exercise and I haven't had any problems since. Within a three- to four-week period, my knees were so much better, and they continue to be."

Although structural integration is often mentioned in the same breath as massage and looks a lot like it in action, Epstein said the two therapies are very different in intent.

The goal in massage is relaxation of the muscles, he said.

The goal in structural integration is to manipulate the tissue connecting muscle and bone to make movement easier and less painful, similar to the effects of practicing yoga.

Rolfing is a trademarked type of structural integration reserved for graduates of the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration in Boulder, Colo.

"We try to create a person that's integrated so when they move, the biomechanics of how they move are more efficient," said Epstein, a former salesman who underwent a midlife career switch after seeing how Rolfing relieved his old sports injuries.

Rolfing is named after Ida Rolf, a biochemist who began exploring alternative medicine in the 1930s because of health problems she and her sons suffered.

Rolf believed that the body's connective tissues - especially the fascia - are as important to pain-free living as the muscles and bones.

Although Rolf died in 1979, her theories of soft-tissue manipulation and movement education are still winning converts. This October, the first International Fascia Research Congress is being held at Harvard Medical School.

Over the years, Rolfing has gained a reputation as an excruciatingly penetrating form of body work - an image that was hilariously satirized in the

1977 Burt Reynolds movie "Semi-Tough."

Structural integrationists today still go deep, Epstein said, but they take a more gradual approach. The practitioner begins at the feet and works up to the head during a series of 10 sessions that can be spread over weeks or months.

"We're trying to get into tissue and move it back into its proper compartments," he said. "It's a very ambitious goal. Any time you're trying to lengthen tissue, there's going to be more sensation. Some people interpret sensation as pain but it's not always true."

Alsip, a "no-pain, no-gain" kind of guy, admits there were a few times during his sessions when he gritted his teeth. But it was a good hurt, not a bad hurt, he said. By the end of his 10th session he could feel a difference throughout his body.

"I felt really good," he said. "I felt a little lighter on my feet. There seemed to be more of a spring in my step."

Structural integration tends to be more expensive than other types of body work, running about \$100 for a 75-minute session.

Alsip, a retired statistician who runs a 10K twice a week and bikes 50 minutes five days a week, said his only regret is that he can't fit the treatment into his budget more often.

"I'd love to be able to afford to do it all year round," he said.

Reporter Mary Challenger can be reached at (515) 284-8470 or mchallender@dmreg.com

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About the Author

From desmoinesregister.com:

Massage Therapy 101 features resources for all sorts of massage therapy topics including massage therapy school registration, massage.

Gestalt is an experiential therapy that stresses feelings and the influence of unfinished business on personality.

Most people who seek Rolfing therapy are motivated either by pain, or by a sense of tightness and restriction.

Rolfing, visceral manipulation, craniosacral therapy from Jeffrey Burch, certified practitioner.

Alan Richardson is a Cranio Sacral Therapist with therapy rooms in Regents Park and East Finchley.

Whole Body Balance provides massage, chiropractic care, acupuncture, rolfing, low level laser therapy, push therapy and therapeutic wellness.

Denver, Arvada, Westminster Colorado, medical massage therapy, body work, Neuromuscular, Deep Tissue, sports, Rolfing, stress reduction, pain management.

Rolf Structural Integration Therapy is a holistic method of bodywork that can help you with effective, long term relief from chronic.

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