

Use Rolfing® to Reshape the Body

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YOUR PERSONALITY AND the events of your life are all recorded in the shapes and features of your body, just as the history of a tree is written in its rings and the bends of its branches. Fortunately, our bodies are much more malleable and plastic than a tree's. In its most natural state, a "bodymind" responds fluidly and uniquely to each new demand and feeling that arises. An enormous range of feeling, expression, and responsive action is available to us, as wide a range as we see in young children. Over the years, however, most of us innocently acquire many layers of physical and psychological restrictions--fixed attitudes and repetitive patterns which manifest in our very bodily shape. As time goes on, they lock us into a narrower and narrower range of responses and possibilities.

These "restrictions" can originate from physical or emotional causes. A physical cause could be a fall on our tailbone at age five, bowed legs from walking around our diapers as a toddler, a wrenching car accident. When we remain hampered by such events, months or years later, these parts of us are still stuck in the past, at the point of that event. As a biological system, we reorganize around the dysfunction, but to the degree it limits or hurts us, our system is not able to process the aberration through and out. It is still locked into our structure and tissues. The body wants to be as fluid and open and adaptable as it was before the limiting pattern, but until that pattern is released, our bowed legs from our toddlerhood are still there, and so on.

Attitudes and Emotions Manifest in our Physical Shape

Our bodies and minds can become "frozen in time" from psycho-emotional causes as well; attitudes and emotions manifest in our physical shapes. An emotional trauma to the human system can be too severe for the energetic organism to process and discharge. In that case, we might shut-down or freeze-up or collapse; there are any number of responses wherein the shock to the organism is not "experienced through." It is repressed, disowned, and becomes locked in the being, and literally in the body, waiting to be released. When talk-therapy alone fails to produce the changes we want, it is often because of this somatic dimension: Our very bodily shape is constantly perpetuating the old patterning. The body is virtually frozen in time.

Single-event traumas are not the only culprits. On-going though perhaps less intense "insults" to a person which are maintained and repeated over time, (especially during childhood) very commonly shape our form. Abuse in its countless forms--neglect, smothering, belittlement, intimidation, unrealistic expectations, and so on--all create characteristic responses in the human organism which have physical expression. These responses contribute to our bodily shape over time. Consider the cartoon caricatures we all know of the "beaten man," the "uptight woman," the "grandiose, inflated man," and so on. As biological and energetic systems, we do take such shapes on, although less exaggeratedly or simplistically.

A child that grows up feeling unsafe may develop a pattern of the head pulled forward, anxiously into the future, rather than the head balancing lightly on top of the neck. As I stretch, soften, and lengthen the front of their body, the head begins to come back. They gain an organic possibility of thinking and feeling into this new shape and way of being.

Whether our "bodymind" shows patterns from single, traumatic events or from long-term abuse, we are not fully living in the present. The very essence of neurosis can be thought of as repetition, the same patterns endlessly playing out, regardless of the situation. On some level, we feel "old" when we live this way because it is old.

As psychobiological organisms, we are self-regulating systems. That means there is an innate intelligence in our energetic being which is trying to bring these dysfunctional patterns into consciousness, trying to release the old insults. The stories your shape tells need to be "experienced through," the cellular memory released, and new possibilities lived into. To do this is to bring these parts of the psyche and the body back into the present.

Rolfing Transforms

For 30 or 40 years, Rolfing® has been acknowledged as a very powerful way to engage this transformation. Rolfing is not massage. Rolfing actually changes people's shape, aligning and organizing the body in gravity. Your own body, your energetic system, has immense wisdom; Rolfing accesses this wisdom, releasing old, repetitive and dysfunctional patterns. In the process, chronic and acute pains are usually resolved quite effectively, and that's why most people come to Rolfing.

What is less well known is the psychological dimension of the work. The goal is not to "exorcise" our old shapes and patterns or make them "bad." They still remain available to us as conscious options, part of our richness, but only as options, in a greater continuum of present-time expression and response.

Of course, the client must be ready for such change, and must be consciously committed to the process. There is no healing modality which relieves the client of responsibility, nor should there be. And many times, for psychological change, it is best to be Rolfed while engaging in traditional therapy.

When all is said and done, Rolfing is most simply about "unbinding time," bringing your body and mind into fuller relationship with the newness of the here and now, whether that means releasing an old back pain, or an old emotional disposition. The result is greater freedom in the here-and-now.