

## Bodywork & Exercise

### Increase Body Awareness While Increasing Your Activity

Ruth Werner

You have to give us credit: as a culture, Americans are incredibly interested in getting fit. We invest every year in new diets, exercise programs, and supplements for weight loss and improved energy. Low-range estimates suggest that Americans spend about \$2.6 billion each year on gym memberships alone.

We also tend to pitch full speed into any given commitment. If we're going to get fit, by golly, we're going to do it now, regardless of how long it took us to get into our current state. We don't do things by half measures, and moderation is not in our nature. So how do we keep ourselves injury-free while honoring our commitment to exercise and get healthy?

sports field seems to appeal to our competitive spirit--especially when we're surrounded by others who all seem to be doing better than we are. Combine this kind of human drive with poorly trained athletic trainers who give bad advice about form, pacing, and effort, and we have a recipe for potential problems.

Exercise is only effective when it occurs without injury. Any new exercise program requires some caution, even if it is comparatively easygoing. And more challenging programs are safest and most successful when new participants build up their activity levels carefully and receive excellent guidance about form.

#### WHEN IT GOES WRONG

We accrue musculoskeletal and fascial

*Live in such a way that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip.*

-Will Rogers

#### Office Hours and Contact

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Moderation is key when beginning a new exercise program

#### DOES IT HAVE TO BE ALL OR NOTHING?

We all know that starting an exercise program doesn't actually mean we'll finish it. When we throw ourselves into an ambitious new routine, we are likely to overdo it and get hurt. Then, we get discouraged, and may give up entirely, only to start the cycle over in another year or so.

Overdoing things in the gym or on the

injuries throughout our entire lifespans. In the best circumstances, they heal well, with a minimum of internal scar tissue, and function returns to practically normal levels. When things are ideal, that sprained ankle you got playing soccer at age 12 doesn't affect your ability to walk in your 30s. The lumbar

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strain you got from picking up the heavy laundry basket 15 years ago resolved well, so at 62, it won't hinder your golf game. We are able to adapt to minor injuries, and we learn how not to exacerbate them.

But when we introduce a new exercise program, especially if that exercise program is more demanding, or demanding in different ways than we have experienced before, we risk the flaring up of old injuries. Scar tissue does not have the weight-bearing capacity of healthy muscle or connective tissue. This is when that old sprained ankle may make itself known, and that weakness in your back will definitely have opinions about your new routine. Sometimes you might feel like your new commitment to fitness was not the best idea.

#### INJURIES CAN HAPPEN ANY TIME

CrossFit is one program that gets a lot of attention because of its reputation for being especially demanding. But any type of exercise can lead to injury if correct form is not observed. Zumba, Jazzercise, and other dance-like programs bring a risk of foot and leg injuries, including sprained ankles, plantar fasciitis, and stress fractures, because the risk for twisting at the knee is so high.

If you aren't paying close attention to your own limits, even yoga can be a source of soft-tissue injury: delayed soreness, problems at the neck and sacroiliac joints, or other injuries. One massage therapist reported seeing several injuries related to a prolonged yoga headstand, probably in a student who was not ready for this challenge.

#### HOW CAN MASSAGE HELP?

Massage can help you deal with pain or soreness from your exercise regimen and can also help shorten recovery periods so you can train more efficiently. Although massage therapists are not primary care providers, and cannot diagnose conditions or prescribe specific treatments, your therapist may be able to offer excellent advice for dealing with a fitness-related injury. He or she may also have suggestions about warm-ups, cool-downs, and postexercise stretching, or be able to point you to an appropriate coach or other professional for specific exercise needs and to help prevent future injury.

The incidence of exercise-related injury

has a lot to do with people not paying attention to their own needs. One of the many things massage therapy offers to people who want to become healthier and more fit is the chance to become more aware of your own body in a powerfully positive way. Increased body awareness and self-appreciation may be the best tools for helping you increase activity levels without hurting yourself. In this way, you can reach your goals with power and joy, rather than with pain and injury.

*Ruth Werner is a former massage therapist, a writer, and a continuing education provider. She wrote A Massage Therapist's Guide to Pathology (Lippincott Williams + Wilkins, 2013).*



Massage can get you back on track following an exercise-related injury

# Rolfing and Structural Integration

*Karrie Osborn*

While there are differences between these two popular fascial release therapies, they both represent the work of Ida P. Rolf (1896-1979). With a doctorate in biochemistry from Columbia University, Rolf also explored osteopathy and yoga as a means to see the effect of structure on function. What came from her studies was what she called "structural integration," a process of soft-tissue manipulation and movement education that reorganizes the body into its natural, aligned state for optimum function. When the body is out of alignment, it creates undo pressure on the structure, leading to unhealthy compensations.

Over the course of a 10-session protocol, therapists focus on a specific sequence of soft-tissue manipulations to help clients rediscover their optimal state. While some of the work might be very intense, its "depth" is dependent on the level of trauma the body's tissues have experienced. Focusing on the fascia, sessions might include constant,

applied pressure or slow, deep stretching. Clients are involved in the process, facilitating a stretch or a movement as directed. Clients typically wear underwear or swimsuits during the work, and as part of the assessment, therapists will evaluate clients' balance, movement patterns, posture, and stance.

Within our body is a matrix of weblike material called fascia, or connective tissue. Very simply, it's what binds the body together. When stress and injury take their toll, they create restriction and tightening of these important inner tissues, making them less pliable and more a source of tension. Rolfing utilizes physical manipulation and movement awareness to bring head, shoulders, thorax, pelvis, and legs into vertical alignment and structural organization back to the body. It allows more efficient use of the muscles with less expended energy by lifting the head and chest and lengthening the body's trunk.



**Ida Rolf, the founder of Rolfing**

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## Flotation Tanks

*Brandon Twyford*

If you want to take the concept of completely stopping even further, try totally unplugging from the noise of everyday life in a flotation tank.

Developed in 1954 to test the effects of sensory deprivation, the flotation tank is now used in a range of restorative and healing practices, including recovery from exercise or injury. It is also an effective tool for visualization techniques.

The tank contains water heated to the exact temperature of the skin--thereby removing the sense of touch--and 800-1,000 pounds of Epsom salt for buoyancy. The result is a unique sensation that's completely unlike floating in a pool. It's more like floating in space. When we float in a normal pool, or even when we are asleep in bed, tiny muscles throughout our body are constantly working to adjust and support

us. The flotation tank, however, allows you to completely let go.

I first experienced floating in 2006 on the recommendation of a friend. The idea sounded intriguing to me, so I decided to try it out by booking a session at my local yoga studio. I disrobed, put my earplugs in, and climbed into the tank. I laid back, stretched out, and closed my eyes.

Total isolation. The thoughts in my head, previously a subconscious presence of constant background noise, were suddenly deafening. I opened my eyes into pitch-black darkness. I was momentarily disoriented, and it took several minutes before I was able to consciously allow my body and mind to relax. As I did, I felt the dense water support every inch of my body.

At the end of the one-hour session, I was still discovering parts of my body

where I had unconsciously been holding tension. The nape of my neck. My ankles. My ears. My hips. Places I hadn't even known I was using when my body was at rest. As I consciously let go of each of these body parts, I slipped further into a state of total physical relaxation. By the time I left the tank, my body felt more relaxed than it had in years.

Flotation tanks can be found in most cities, often as an auxiliary service at a yoga studio or wellness center, and an hour-long session runs about \$40-\$60. Until the average person can hitch a ride into space, this is as close as we'll get to experiencing total removal from the constant barrage of external stimuli on our overworked senses.

Lie back, close your eyes, and unplug.  
*Brandon Twyford is assistant editor for Associated Bodywork Massage Professionals.*

*Whatever words  
we utter should  
be chosen with  
care, for people  
will hear them  
and be  
influenced by  
them, for good  
or ill.*

-Buddha

#### MESSAGE TO OUR CLIENTS

Thank you for taking time to read this newsletter, gaining further insight into the benefits of massage therapy. It has been our pleasure here at ABLC to be able to work with so many amazing people who allow us into their lives and help them achieve the balance they want out of life. Enjoy the articles, there are many more to come.

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