

# A Practical Guide to Roling® SI

*by Owen Marcus*

I am the first to admit that naming a technique “Roling” was not the best marketing move. Ida Rol, Ph.D., the founder, would have agreed. It wasn’t her choice, the name just stuck.

The goal of this ebook is to give you a quick and simple guide to Roling Structural Integration (SI) what it might do for you, and how it works. I live in a small town in northern Idaho, so I am not writing this as a means to increase my practice. I don’t expect any of you to come see me for Roling SI. I just hope I can support those who are interested in Receiving Roling SI.

If you are like most people, you heard a few things about Roling SI. You may have heard it hurts. Yes, there can be some pain, much like getting in shape or stretching can be painful (more on this later). But Roling SI still exists after 60 years and more than a million clients because it works. It is not a panacea — but if stress relief, soft tissue repair or structure realignment are your issues or goals, Roling SI may be the best thing for you.



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## The Four Reasons to Be Rolfed

### *Fix the unfixable*

Many of the clients who find their way to a Rolfer's door do so because she or he had "tried everything." These people want to be well, and have often invested tens of thousands of dollars to discover what is wrong and trying to fix it. They might have tired surgery, medication, physical therapy, chiropractic... yet the pain remains. After a multitude of tests, nothing shows up. Some are labeled hypochondriacs or relegated to taking psychotropic drugs to treat their "emotional problems."

When medical tests don't find a cause, often holistic health treatments can go beyond the finding the cause to assisting healing it. Roling SI is particularly good at treating chronic soft tissue and stress sources. As we get older we accumulate more tension in our bodies. This stress and tension ends up in the fascia (the connective tissue of our body that holds everything together).

There is no clinical test for the relative buildup of fascial tension. There is no drug or physical therapy to release that stress. Over time, this tension pulls on your bones, your joints and your internal organs.

For most patients, until the chronic tension is released, no lasting improvement is possible. One of Roling SI's goals is to release the chronic tension of the body, freeing the body to heal itself.

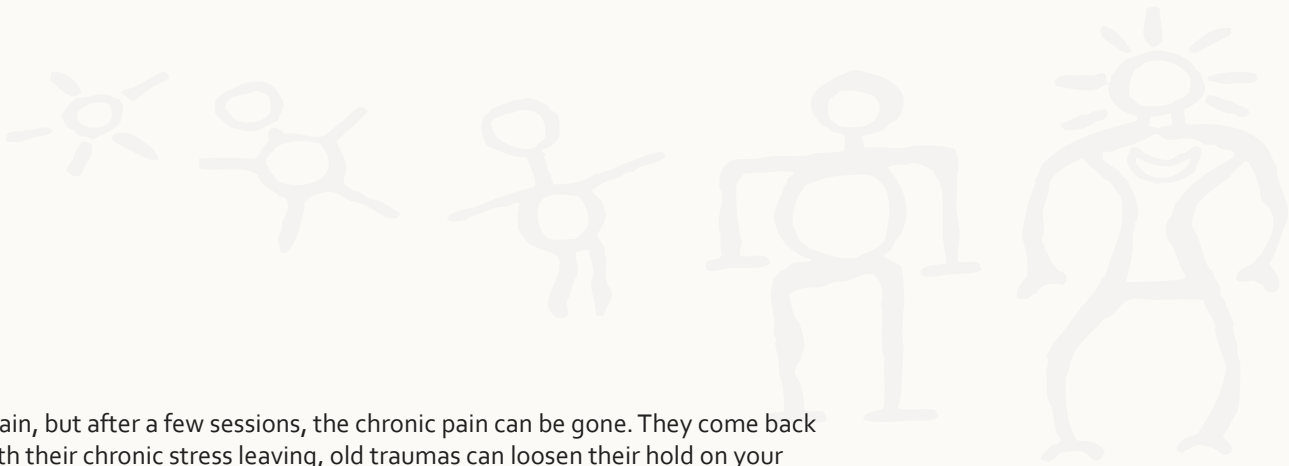
### *Improve performance*

A tight body is not only more prone to injury and pain, its performance is limited. It is as if you're attempting to move in a jumpsuit that is too small. Part of the problem is that the jumpsuit gradually shrunk over many years causing you to lose awareness of its effect on your performance.

Rolfers began speaking about core muscles back in the 1960s — and people thought we were nuts. Now with the growth of Pilates and yoga, core strength is a hot topic. They are right, when your movement and power comes from those deep muscles you are less likely to injure yourself and more likely to perform better. Frequently people are so bound up that even with good instruction they are unable to fully access their core. Some will just end up making their core muscles tighter as they get stronger.

With Roling SI, a client will not only release the chronic stress, they'll be able to access their core muscles and they learn to use gravity as their ally. True core usage and natural use of gravity go together. From my experience of working with elite athletes, I learned this relationship frequently was the difference in winning.

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### *Improve quality of life*

Most clients come to Rolwing SI to relieve pain, but after a few sessions, the chronic pain can be gone. They come back for the subtle benefits of feeling better. With their chronic stress leaving, old traumas can loosen their hold on your mind and body. What might have seemed like an emotional block just melts away with the release of tension.

Learning to breathe naturally, learning to be relaxed is huge. These benefits may not be understood until the tension leaves. When the tight jumpsuit is removed, you are free.

### *The best investment*

Numerous times over the years, I have heard clients say that the severe pain that brought them to Rolwing SI was the best thing that could have happened to them. It was the pain that got them to try something as strange as Rolwing SI, which gave them their body back.

We are like the frog in the water slowly coming to a boil. The pain develops slowly, and we don't think of jumping out. Once out of the boiling water, we ask why did I wait so long? Until we feel better, we don't know what we were missing. The investment of Rolwing SI not only can remove the pain, it prevents future problems from developing—you never need to watch for that boiling water again!

After the series of Rolwing SI sessions clients will report that removing their pain wasn't the largest benefit, it was feeling alive again.



## Common Benefits

*Note: this in no way is a guarantee, but to give you as sense of what is possible, Rolfers frequently see these benefits in clients.*

Chronic stress and pain reduction	Healing and prevention of repetitive motion injuries
Injury prevention and recovery	Increased flexibility and coordination
Improved athletic performance	Chronic headaches disappearing
Improved stamina	Back pain healing
Improved posture and gait	TMJ pain elimination
Healthier appearance	Emotional stress transforming into relaxation
Healing of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	More vital energy
Weight lost and cellulite reduction	Enhanced wellbeing
Enhanced circulation	Improved relaxation and sleep
Improved digestive and organ function	Greater enjoyment of the body
Chronic fatigue release and healing	What Roling SI Is the Best at Treating
Fibromyalgia healing	

If your problems or goals fall into any of these categories, Roling SI may be beneficial for you.

### *Structure*

What most will call posture, Rolfers call structure. Posture is the behavioral consequence of structure. Your body's structural order will determine how you move.

To start with, most of what we were told was good posture—shoulders back, chest up and stomach in—are more indic-

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ative of a stress response than good posture. Good posture is effortless. Many of the muscles used to stand and move were not designed for those functions. When a muscle, or for that matter any body part, repeatedly does a job it is not designed to do, it becomes a stress producing physical tension.

If you want to be straight and move with grace, get Rolfed. By releasing the chronic tension, and with a little coaching, you can learn to significantly improve your appearance and movement.

### *Soft tissue*

Soft tissue is what it sounds like; it is the muscles and the fascia (the connective tissue that contains all our body parts). Hans Selye, MD, published his book in 1950, calling fascia the organ of stress. When physical or emotional stress is not released, it is stored in the fascial network throughout the body, reproducing stress even when the stressor is gone. You feel it as tight soft tissue knots up.

There is no drug or surgery that releases that tension. In holistic health treatments, there are several techniques, such as acupuncture and massage that do a great job of releasing the more acute tension. Roling SI excels at releasing the chronic tension from decades of stress, over misuse and injuries.

Rolfers will frequently hear clients say, "I know I would feel better if someone would just loosen me up." Roling SI attempts not only to release the chronic tension, its goal is to prevent it from returning by organizing the body.

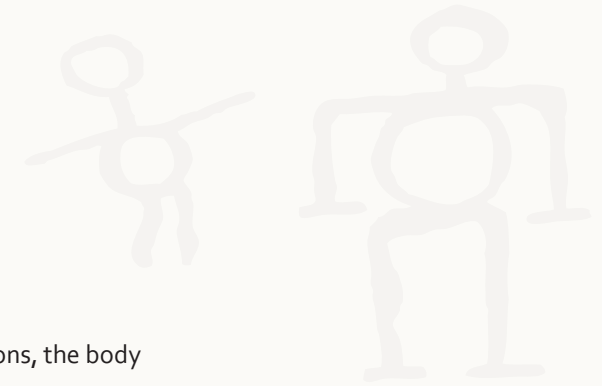
### *Stress*

Your fight or flight response (sympathetic nervous system response) is meant to kick in only when you are in danger. Unfortunately, because of the stress in your life, and how you learned to deal with that stress, you may never leave the survival response. The problem arises when you constantly use a survival response; the ongoing effect of the response accumulates. The persistent stress response is in part perpetuated by tense fascia, keeping the stress response going. It is as if your accelerator is stuck. Your engine revs even when it idles. Just like the car engine that will burn out, so will your body become old before its time if the body continually experiences stress.

We are beginning to understand the physiology and the effects of constant stress through the research on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). With PTSD, the stressor can be gone, but the traumatic response can continue. Many clients come to Roling SI some place on the PTSD continuum, experiencing stress response when there is no stressor.

There is research showing that Roling SI reduces a client's stress response; in layman's terms, that means you can respond calmly to stressors, rather than react physiologically. Your face doesn't have to flush. Your pulse doesn't need to race. You can simply acknowledge a stressor, and respond to it appropriately.

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### Where Is Roling SI Best Used?

Roling SI is best used to reduce or eliminate the cause of chronic pain. With the release of chronic tensions, the body can heal itself.

Systemic problems such as genetic illness, cancer, and most chronic illnesses are where Roling SI would not be recommended. If the cause or the effect of the condition is out of the rubric of structure, soft tissue or stress, Roling SI's effectiveness significantly declines.

There are conditions where Roling SI will not affect the disease, but can aid in recovery. Post polio syndrome is an excellent example of how Roling SI reverses years of strain from dealing with a disease.

Roling SI's effectiveness in treating chronic conditions does make it effective in treating acute conditions. Many other therapies, such as massage, chiropractics and acupuncture, can also treat new problems effectively. It's not that Roling SI can't help that new back tightness, but if that tightness is not built on a tight body, and is truly new and independent of past situations, Roling SI may not be your only solution.

Massage therapy is most effective with acute problems. Physical therapy is best with rehabilitation from injuries and surgeries. Chiropractic treatments are best with acute problems causing joints being out. Rolfers focus is on chronic soft tissue problems affecting your structure and your stress response.

Bottom line, if your body needs to release persistent tension and consequential problems Roling SI may be the most effective therapy.

### How Does Roling SI Work

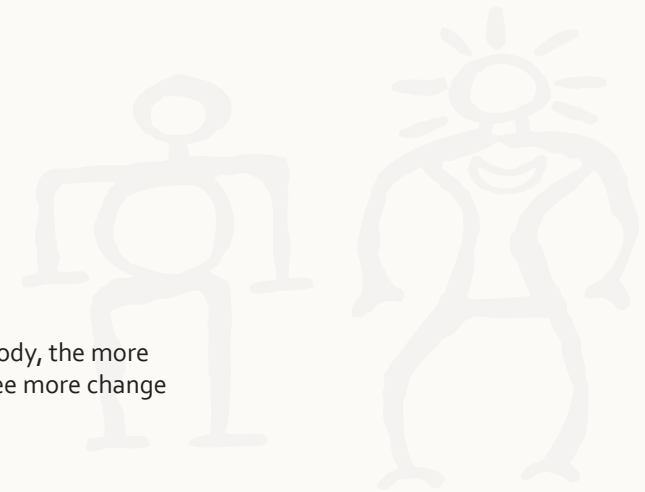
Roling SI is a series of progressive, hour-long sessions. Each focuses on a particular goal and area of the body. These goals and areas vary with the client. The Rolfer will address your immediate concern as he or she addresses the underlying causes and aligns your body to be in balance with gravity so it stays fixed.

The client lies on a wide table in his or her, bathing suit, underwear, or workout clothing. The Rolfer uses his or her hands, forearms or elbows to release the soft tissue with the goal of bringing more order to the body. Through this sculpturing process, the client can experience a deep release of chronic tension.

The Rolfer works at the pace of the client's tissue's ability to let go. Enough pressure needs to be used to release the fascial adhesions, but when done slowly and with sensitivity, the pressure is not great.

A Rolfer is much like a structural engineer evaluating the structural weaknesses that are not yet presenting problems. The cracks in walls can represent a settling foundation. Until the foundation is repaired no matter how often the cracks are repaired, they will return. Your body is the same. Until the shortness and rotation in your leg is released, your neck may always be going out.

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The deep changes Rolfing SI produces will often take up to a year to fully manifest. The tighter your body, the more tension it has. The tensions releases at its own pace, one layer at a time. It is common for a client to see more change in six months of integrating the Rolfing SI changes than from the ten sessions themselves.

### *The Release*

As you lie on a Rolfing SI table, your Rolfer may lean on her elbow against your thigh. Your first sensation may be pain, producing an urge to resist. Because the Rolfer is not increasing her pressure—actually she is just waiting for your tissue to release—you begin to relax. Through relaxing, you surrender to what might have felt like pain, and you start to feel intense sensations. The intensity subsides as the release occurs. With the release increasing, the next sensation is pleasure.

This cycle of intensity to release to pleasure feels much like the one of stretching. The body will learn how to relax as it does from stretching. The tensions or hypersensitivity that might have first existed, a session later could be just pleasure. You learn to relax and be relaxed. Stimulation (i.e., pressure) goes from something that you want to resist to something that is pleasurable to relax into.

The processes of learning to relax on a deep level will vary on the individual. Tough guys, like myself, will often take longer than women. But you knew that....

### *Rolf Movement®*

Ida Rolf, Ph.D. encouraged the development of movement work to assist Rolfing SI clients in their changes and integration. Rolfers were always trained in movement work. Recently all new Rolfers are being certified in Rolf Movement integration.

Unlearning bad habits and learning more effective ways to use your body can be a huge benefit. Some Rolfers integrate this training in their sessions. Others do separate Rolf Movement sessions. Either way, these new awareness can be very useful. They go beyond ergonomics to learning how to enhance the use of your body.





## Frequent Asked Questions

Do I have to commit to ten sessions?

No. Most Rolfer will just have you pay and schedule as you go. In fact, if for some reason you want to switch Rolfers during the series, you can. It is your body and your money.

How often will I have sessions?

Anywhere from twice per week to once a month is the range. Most clients come in once per week. The frequency depends on your body's ability to integrate the work and what works best for you.

Is Roling SI safe?

Yes. As long as you don't have one of the counter indications mentioned earlier, it is safe. A Rolfer's goal is not to force change; it is to evoke change through releasing the soft tissue. The soft tissue can't release if the Rolfer goes too deep or too fast. The biggest risk is you wasted some time and money.

Is Roling SI just stretching?

No. Roling SI goes beyond stretching or yoga by releasing the tightest and hardest areas of your body. Often in stretching, only the looser places stretch. What needs to stretch are thick, bound up areas. Particularly for men with those hard, thick legs stretching often produces frustration. Once Roling SI releases these concrete areas, then stretching can help.

Does Roling SI hurt?

Yes, it can feel painful the first time in very tense areas. It is not the pain of injury. When there is pain, it is from experiencing the tension that was always there. If for some reason, you feel it might be too much, you can tell the Rolfer to stop. You are always in charge.

How does Roling SI work with pain?

With chronic pain, clients are often told there is nothing wrong. I have seen clients sent to psychiatrists to treat "imaginary pain". The interesting thing about pain, particularly soft tissue pain, is there are no definitive tests to evaluate pain.

Chronic pain in itself becomes an escalating condition often only treated with pain medication. For many the secret to ending the pain is releasing the tension and training the body to relax. Yes, this sounds simple—sometimes it is that simple. There is an interesting relationship with pain and awareness. The more pain you have, the less awareness you have. The inverse is true. As you become more aware, which might first feel uncomfortable, the more you are able to release the tension causing the pain.

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A Rolfer's goal is to assist you in releasing your chronic tension and pain. She can only do that if you are relaxing. For that to happen, you must first feel safe, then you must feel you are in control. Then you let go of what you might have not been aware of before nor had the ability to release.

What age range do Rolfers treat?

From infants to the elderly. Most clients are active children or adults.

How does Roling SI affect the aging process?

Through releasing the tension in the fascia, the body becomes more resilient in its structure, movement and appearance. Most clients report feeling younger because their bodies are behaving as they did when they were young. Much of what we contribute to age is the accumulation of stress and tension.

How does Roling SI affect posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia and depression?

Often a connection between these four debilitating conditions is the physical exhaustion caused by a body being stuck in hyper-arousal or survival. Anyone exposed to constant stress will eventually acclimatize to the stress. You learn to adapt emotionally by becoming accustomed to it, and physically sustaining an alert status. No matter how strong you are, eventually the continuous stress will wear you down. How it shows will often be one or more of the above conditions.

To heal, your body must first leave the survival state, the revved-up state. Until your body feels safe, it will be allocating its resources to survival. Roling SI has the ability to deeply release the stress and the self-perpetuating survival response stored in the tissue. Once the body comes down, the resources directed to survival can be used for self-healing. Your body can rest and heal.

What does the medical community think of Roling SI?

Physicians are referring their patients to Rolfers in increasing numbers for chronic problems. There is a growing understanding and appreciation of Roling SI, in part from Rolfers being physicians and many physicians receiving Roling SI. The growing research on fascia continues to put Roling SI in the spotlight as the therapy that treats fascial conditions.

Does insurance pay for Roling SI?

Auto insurance and workers' comp often pay for Roling SI. Medical insurance is more challenging. Referral from a physician and persistence with your insurance company can increase your chances of being paid.

The growth of consumer-driven healthcare plans (CDHP) where the employee and/or employer contribute to a fund pool used to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses for the insurer creates more options. The funds in plans such the plans listed below will usually pay for Roling SI.



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FSAs — Flexible Spending Accounts

MSAs — Medical Savings Accounts

HRAs — Health Reimbursement Arrangements

HSAs — Health Savings Accounts

What can I expect from a session?

Each session begins by asking you what's happened since the previous session—is your pain gone, did you notice anything new, etc. The Rolfer will observe how you move and hold your body.

A Rolwing SI session is not a massage, but like a massage, you will be relaxed afterwards. Clients often report sleeping deeply the night after the first session and feeling relaxed and possibly tired for a few days.

There is usually no soreness after a session. When there is soreness, it isn't the type you get from an injury, but is more like how you would feel after a good stretch or workout. Do not workout later in the day after receiving a session. The next day should be fine to exercise.

How do I choose a good Rolfer?

Ask others who received Rolwing SI. Check out Rolfers' web sites. Call the prospective Rolfer. Ask him or her your questions. And trust your gut. Most Rolfers will offer a free consultation; if in doubt try that. You only need to do one session. Yes, it is theoretically possible the Rolfer could hurt you. My experience is that it is so rare that there is much greater risk from the effects of your tension seriously impacting your health. The worse thing I could see happening is you didn't get what you wanted.

*Take a risk, give a session a try.*



## Final notes

### Not all “Rolfers” are Rolfers.

More and more people are claiming they are Rolfing SI; that’s good because it means Rolfing SI is the go-to therapy. Unfortunately, these other practitioners are not doing Rolfing SI; they were not trained at the Rolf Institute. If they are saying “trained in the Rolf method” that is an indication they most likely are not Rolfers.

Over the years, in most cases when I trace back a complaint about a Rolfer, the Rolfer was not a Rolfer. If you have any doubt, go to the Rolf Institute web site, [www.rolf.org](http://www.rolf.org), to verify that the person you are considering is a Rolfer. The practitioner may be good at what he or she does—but it is not Rolfing SI if he or she is not a certified Rolfer.

*Your mileage may vary*

In 30+ years of Rolfing SI thousands of clients, I have learned a lot about what Rolfing SI can and can’t do. I have attempted to use my experience with Rolfing SI to assist you in determining if Rolfing SI would be appropriate for you. It is not for everyone; but please use this ebook as a guide to determine if it right for you.

### For more information

We have created [www.RolfHub.com](http://www.RolfHub.com) as an information portal and blog on Rolfing SI. Our profession’s site, [www.Rolf.org](http://www.Rolf.org), has a more traditional explanation of Rolfing SI.

### Disclaimer

Consult your own physician or licensed healthcare practitioner regarding the applicability of any opinions or recommendations with respect to your symptoms or medical/psychological condition. Information shared in this ebook or personally is shared for educational purposes.

This information is not to be used to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent a disease. Owen Marcus is not a medical doctor. Rolfing SI® does not replace conventional medicine, but can be a useful supplement to medical treatment.

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