

Pain Free Retirement

By Ron Petit, M.S., M.A., LPC

Have you been looking forward to spending time on the golf course, fishing, doing household projects or being active in a way you just didn't have time for while you were working nine to five? Has that time arrived but you now notice aches and pains that hamper and get in the way of being active and enjoying your new freedom? Had you hoped these little maladies might just go away with a little rest and relaxation but find it just isn't happening?

All too often old injuries, strains or habitual ways of using our bodies over the years set us up for vulnerabilities and nagging muscle and joint pain that seems to get worse as we age. Perhaps this explains Walter Mathau and Jack Lemon's grumpiness in the film parody of 1993 on men and aging. It's hard to be cheerful when your back, neck and knees all hurt.

There is help. Old fixed ways of holding and using our bodies can be softened, relaxed and coaxed into new posture and movement patterns with an approach called Rolfing Structural Integration.

Rolfing you say. What kind of silly name is that? Rolfing was the name that stuck to an approach originally called Structural Integration by its originator, Dr. Ida P. Rolf, PhD (Biochemistry). Dr. Rolf worked for the Rockefeller Foundation as a researcher and discovered some pretty amazing properties of a fibrous protein like substance called collagen, that makes up myofascia, a key type of tissue when it comes to personal injuries, stress and stiffness. What she found was that collagen polypeptide chains that are produced in the body in a triple helix geometric structure, rearrange their geometric orientation to provide increased tensile strength after injuries and even after life's stressful events have passed. Layers of myofascial become fibrous and essentially glued together which restricts motion in joints and limbs after an injury. Although useful to prevent re-injury and to splint an injured area in the acute stage, these restrictions often become a problem themselves as weeks and years go by. After stress or an injury, we find we've shifted our weight ever so slightly to take weight off an injured area. Sometimes we carry our shoulder girdle and neck differently so as not to irritate an injury there. Over the years, these little compensations add up. As we get older, the fascia and connective tissue that enwraps joints and bones get more brittle and less resilient. This is a setup for aches, pains and stiffness, all definitely part of the traditional annoyances of aging.

The good news is that these types of scenarios can be reversed by the skillful application of pressure combined with strategic movement that stretches, lengthens and introduces new movement patterns into this soft tissue called myofascia. Through a planned sequence of 10 sessions, and sometimes more, the soft tissue is reordered to support our ideal posture. This brings with it better range of motion, more resilience and flexibility in the joints and blessed relief from the usual related deterioration in these areas found as we age.

Golfers like Tom Watson or basketball players like Charles Barkley, Danny Ainge or AC Green have all experienced the enhanced freedom of motion and strength that occurs as a result of the Rolfing process. Artists like the late Georgia O'Keefe continued to work well into her 80's due to the increased flexibility, agility and freedom from the effects of joint and muscle pain as a result of the Rolfing sessions received.

There are alternatives to giving our money to TheraGestic, Excedrin or Aleve. We can reclaim our body's ability to heal itself, given the right tools and influences. Rolfing can be a part of that opportunity.

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