

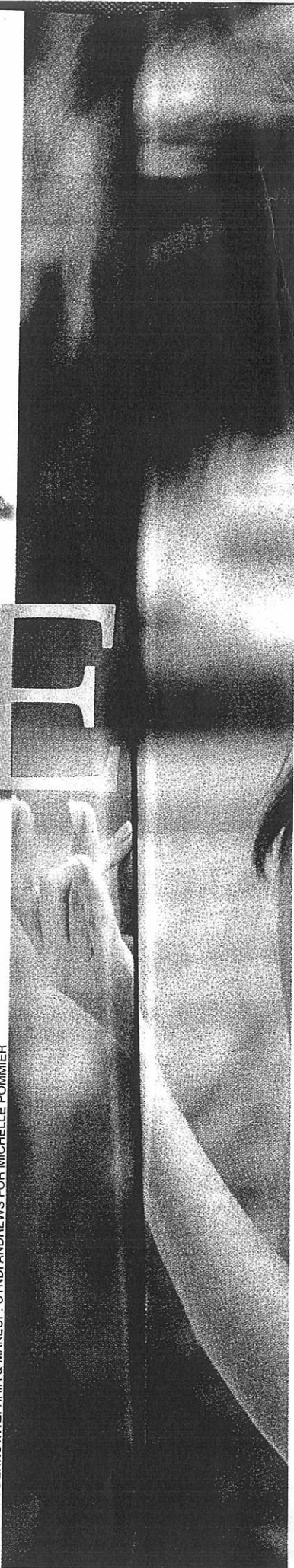
Breath of LIFE

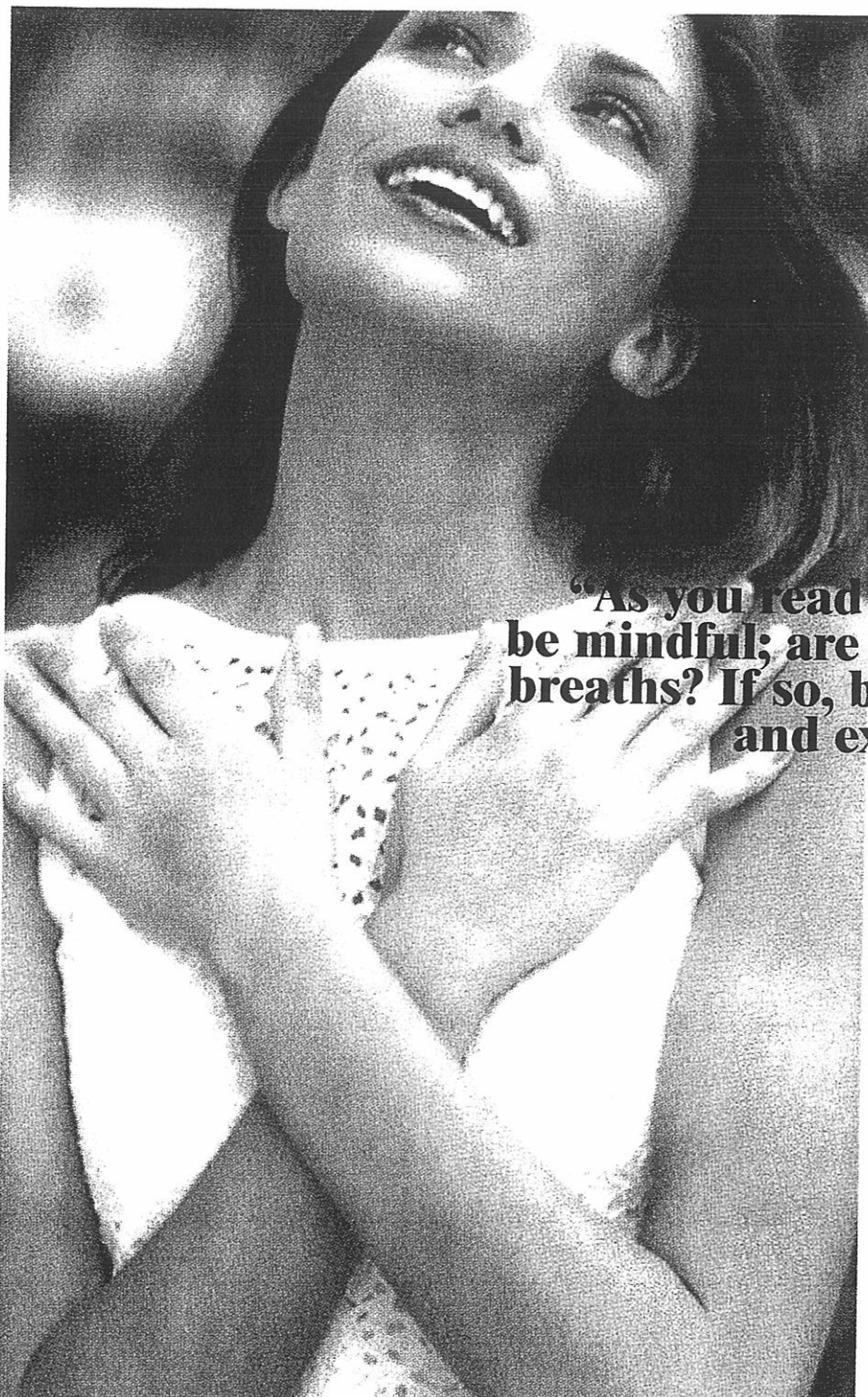
by Siobhan Fitzpatrick

Sometimes things happen for a reason, like getting this assignment. I began this article on , breathwork just as my new boyfriend announced that he would be sharing his studio apartment with two young, beautiful, visiting French women for the next three weeks. While I watched my head orbit into outer space, I wondered how I was going to make it through this conversation — and the next three weeks — without having a mental-meltdown.

Then I began this story, and I learned. It was simple, really: I just had to breathe correctly. As I tuned into this automatic body function, and then consciously re-trained myself to do it correctly through the practice of breathwork, I experienced its optimum benefit — peaceful relaxation.

SAM BERKOWITZ: HAIR & MAKEUP: CYNDI ANDREWS FOR MICHELLE POMMIER





"As you read this sentence, be mindful; are you taking short breaths? If so, breathe in deeply and exhale."

of your lungs. This means that your body will have reduced levels of oxygen," she warns.

As you read this sentence, be mindful; are you taking short breaths? If so, breathe in deeply and exhale. This deep diaphragmatic breathing, says Aristotle Economou, Ph.D., an expert at the International Academy of Medical Acupuncture in Beverly Hills, is the proper way to do it. While you'd think this would come naturally, it doesn't. Most people have to relearn the best way to breathe.

One common mistake many make is unconsciously holding their breath. While it may be an automatic reaction to tighten up your body when under stress, this only increases tension levels since you are depriving yourself of necessary nourishment. To avoid this problem, try and tune in to your breath at least once an hour. You don't have to do any fancy exercises, just make sure air is flowing freely.

In addition to relaxation, breathwork has other benefits including cleansing the respiratory system and blood stream, and increasing alertness. In fact, all of our organs and systems benefit when cells are properly oxygenated, says Economou. Conversely, when not enough oxygen reaches our cells, the result is a buildup of carbon dioxide which can later alter the body's delicate pH (acidity of the blood) and result in sickness and low energy levels. Research shows that smooth diaphragmatic breathing quiets the stress response and induces relaxation, while rapid shallow chest breathing tends to create a "high-strung" anxious condition more prone to the release of adrenaline in the blood stream.

Learning how to breathe properly and practicing different kinds of breathwork can also help unleash our creativity and enhance other brain functions. This is particularly true in breathwork exercises that focus on inhaling and exhaling through our

nostrils. According to Jeffrey A. Aronson (The Art of Breathing in Life), studies from the University of California have shown that through our tendency to superiority, brain function is such that there is no state of mind task at hand. Acting through the senses pares a person's language-oriented and Midwestern breathing through common creative

Alternate nostril breathing is used by some advanced techniques to begin practicing lowering ten "tuner" steps positioned in the approximate same place as you are concerned again, you nostril breathing advanced me

Before you is well vent comfortable ing exercise meal. If you gling sense alarmed; this are perform the lightest awhile until begin again

A free technique available to all, breathwork can be a powerful tool to help people remain balanced in a world full of surprises — like unexpected houseguests. Experts tout its ease and effectiveness. "I can recommend no single more powerful, or simple daily practice to further your health and well-being, than breathing," says Andrew Weil, M.D., on his new CD, *Breathing, the Master Key to Self Healing* (Thorne Communications).

Now that we know it works, let's make sure we know what it is. Breathwork involves controlling the

rate and the way that air flows through your body. Unfortunately, most people are shallow or chest breathers as opposed to deep diaphragm breathers. "The reasons for chest breathing are many: In trying to stay up with fashion you have cut off your oxygen intake by wearing tight pants, girdles, and belts. Or perhaps you're required to sit at a desk all day in order to earn a living," says Jill R. Johnson, a Conifer, Colorado-based breathwork expert. "Whatever the reason, if you are a chronic shallow breather, the obvious and immediate effect is poor ventilation

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nostrils. According to James E. Loehr and Jeffrey A. Migdow, M.D., authors of *Breathe In, Breathe Out* (Time Life), studies performed at the University of California at San Diego have shown that the cycle of breathing through our two nostrils corresponds to superiority of right brain vs. left brain functions. "What this means is that there is now a tool with which our state of mind can be adapted to the task at hand. A few minutes of breathing through the right nostril better prepares a person for mathematical or language-oriented work," writes Loehr and Migdow. "A few minutes of breathing through the left nostril summons creative powers."

Alternate nostril breathing is considered by some experts to be a slightly advanced technique, so before you begin practicing that, first tackle the following ten "breathwork" for the beginner" steps provided by experts mentioned in this article. Do them at approximately the same time and in the same place everyday if possible. Once you are comfortable with this ritual, again, you can incorporate alternate nostril breathing or other more advanced methods.

Before you begin make sure the room is well ventilated and you're wearing comfortable clothing. Never do breathing exercises immediately following a meal. If you feel a little dizzy or a tingling sensation internally, don't be alarmed; this is usually a sign that you are performing the exercise properly. If the lightheadedness continues, stop for awhile until you feel better and then begin again.

10 STEPS FOR THE BEGINNER

1. Sit comfortably in a chair with your feet flat on the floor, knees together, spine straight, and shoulders comfortably pulled back but not curved. Try to keep your chest forward, releasing any tension in your body. Focus your attention on your breath. Don't worry if your mind wanders to other things, just gently bring it back to your breath.
2. In your sitting position, place the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth. This is called the yogi position because many Yogi philosophers proclaim that when your tongue is placed here, you are completing a circuit and keeping the energy of breath within, instead of letting it escape your body.
3. Relax the muscles in your face, including your lips, as you gently close your eyes.
4. Slowly inhale through your nose and fill your abdomen up with air. Make sure your abdomen, not your chest, is expanding. Check to see if you're inhaling correctly by placing one hand on your abdomen and one hand on your chest. As you breathe in through your nostrils, visualize your breath moving down through your abdomen. You should feel your abdomen expand, and as you exhale, contract.
5. When you have reached full inhalation, pause.
6. Next, "lock" your breath with a big "sniff" and hold it for approximately 20 seconds.
7. Now, slowly exhale through your mouth. You should feel your

"Learning how to breathe properly and practicing different kinds of breathwork can also help unleash our creativity and enhance other brain functions."





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abdomen starting to contract. Make sure your tongue stays at the top of your mouth as you breathe out. This will produce a whistling sound. By squeezing more air out of your lungs, you will automatically take more air into them.

8. When you have completely exhaled, relax your whole body.

9. Now repeat steps one through eight, but this time, smile and enjoy it.

10. After you have finished your last repetition, sit quietly in a chair for ten minutes.

Ideally you should do these sessions every day, however, if the exercises are too difficult, don't force yourself. "The best breathing traditions teach becoming aware of one's breathing pattern before trying to change it," says Michael Grady, an instructor at the Himalayan Institute in Pennsylvania. "Trying to force ourselves into a breathing pattern that is inappropriate can be very disturbing, while having an awareness of your breathing can, in

itself, be healing."

While these techniques are pretty harmless, Grady warns people not to overdo it. "As a general rule, do not be talked into practicing long periods of breath retention unless you have really prepared for it and anything that disturbs you physically or mentally is better left alone," he adds.

Once you've mastered the basics, if

you are interested in additional exercises, there are many advanced techniques available. Some, such as those that involve slow deep breathing, may even transform your life, since they lead to "the door of meditation," Grady notes. So what are you waiting for? Inhale, turn the knob, and step through the threshold to better health and balance. 🌿

Read, Phone, Shop

Simply Breathing, a collection of essays about basic exercises. To order call 800-253-6243.

Oxycise, by Jill R. Johnson. To order call 303-838-0512.

The Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Lenox, Massachusetts, 800-741-7353.

Aristotle Economou at the International Academy of Medical Acupuncture in Beverly Hills, 310-246-1730.

Breathe In, Breathe Out by James E. Loehr, and Jeffrey A. Miodow, M.D. (Time Life Books)

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A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ROLFING

HEAL THE BODY HEAL THE MIND

by Siobhan Fitzpatrick

For years,

*Susie Demarco

suffered from chronic knee pain. Although she saw numerous doctors to treat her ailment, the best relief they could offer her was a temporary shot of cortisone. After she had her first baby, the pain became unbearable, so a friend suggested she try Rolfing. Desperate, she agreed to test this form of alternative medicine. The decision changed her life.

Demarco discovered through Rolfing, a very deep, structural massage, that the cause for her knee pain was emotional. When Susie was a child she was physically abused, a memory she had repressed until her Rolfer started working on her troubled area.

"What ended up happening was that by touching Susie," says Cindy Jamieson, Susie's Rolfer in Minneapolis, "she was reliving her physical abuse. And that particular area wasn't necessarily where she got abused, but it was where it got stored."

Stories like Susie's are not uncommon. Increasingly in the past two decades, people have turned to Rolfing as a last resort to cope with their chronic physical pain. While there are no

exact statistics on the number of people Rolfed, certified Rolfers seem to be in demand. In the past decade, the number of trained Rolfers has increased by almost 100 percent, from a few hundred to over a thousand.

Why is Rolfing becoming so popular? "Because it works," says Bret Nye, M.D., family practitioner and a certified Rolfer in Loveland, CO. "Traditional medicine has things it does very well: the battle against microbes, bacteria, fungi. But we do badly at dealing with most chronic conditions, like hypertension."

Traditional medicine also falls short when it comes to treating repressed traumatic memories, like Susie's. But Susie's revelation did not surprise her Rolfer. "Our skin becomes like an enormous video recorder and records our life history — good, bad, and indifferent. When you touch, you have access to a different layer of the body's conscious mind. So there are things that people can access through Rolfing that they've tried [to reach] for years, but couldn't get to in cognitive therapy."

To help clients cope with such traumatic revelations, some Rolfers will advise them to pursue cognitive therapy

in addition to their Rolfing sessions. But it completely depends on the client because some people start Rolfing to treat an emotional ailment that they have not been able to resolve through traditional talk therapy; the theory being that by healing the body, you help heal the mind.

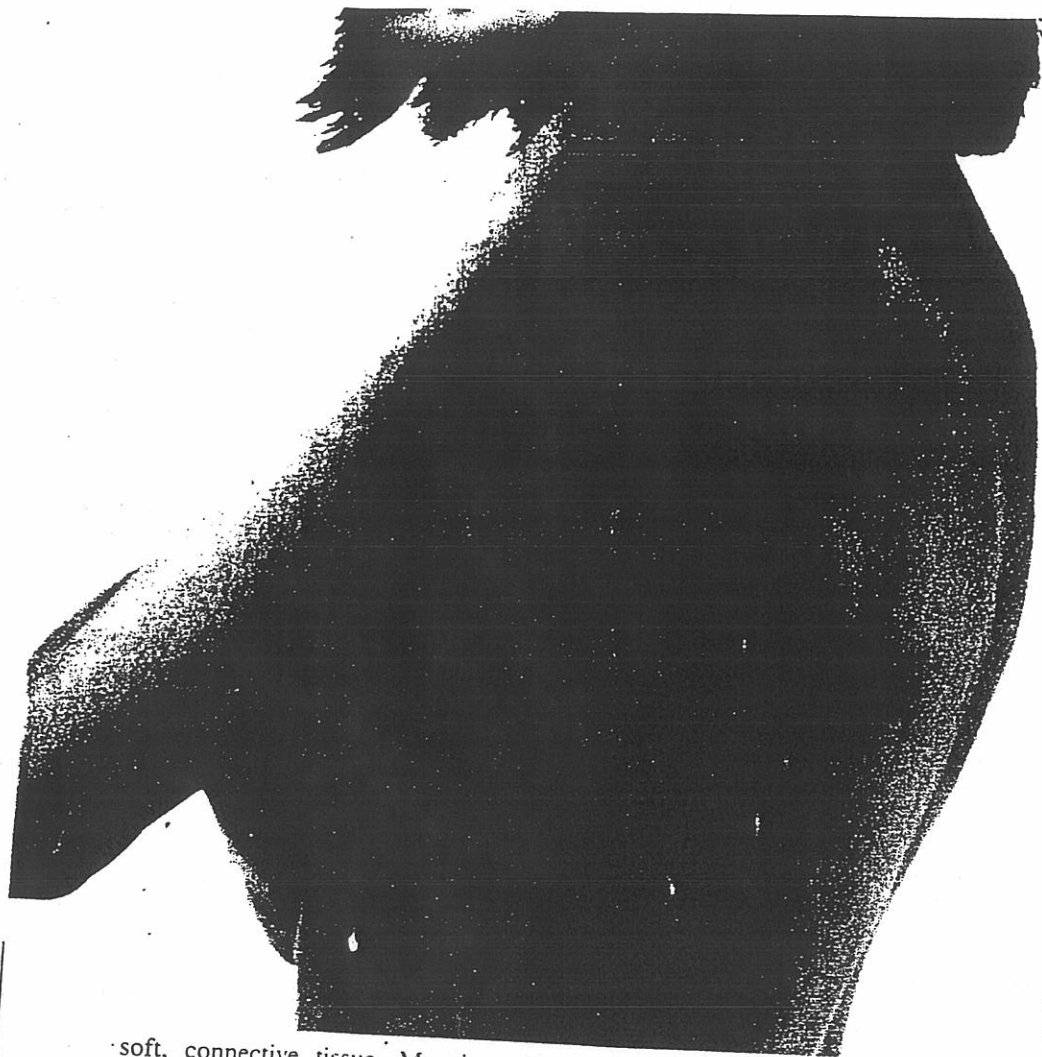
Rolfers believe that whether the root of a person's trauma is physical or psychological, the body will compensate for the damage. If left untreated, this could mean chronic injury throughout a person's life. But there is hope. Fortunately, says Judith Roberts, a certified Rolfer in New York City, most of these structural problems can be fixed through Rolfing.

The goal of Rolfing is to restore balance to the body by restructuring it to eliminate old negative holding patterns. "As in all matter organized into biological units, there is a pattern, an order, in human bodies," says Ida P. Rolf, who founded Rolfing in the 1930s. In order for Rolfing to be most effective, experts say that you must commit to ten one-hour sessions.

The Rolfer helps restore this order by systematically organizing the body's

Photographed by Gregory Cherin





soft, connective tissue. Meaning, the human body stands upright by pairs of muscle groups, and when one of the pair contracts, the other must extend to keep balance. But if that relationship is adversely affected by chronic pain, or an injury, then the rest of the body will compensate to maintain balance.

focuses primarily on the alignment of the spine and bones.

This form of body work is not without controversy. It is relatively expensive, costing between \$75-\$120 a session. Also, many who have tried Roling understand why it has earned a reputation for being a physically arduous

Not only did getting Rolfed heal chronic pain, but it also changed her. "By the second session, I knew I would quit and become a Rolfer," says Cindy who wanted to help others experience the same kind of healing she had. "So I'm truly aware of the power it can have."

While you're contemplating whether or not Roling is for you, read on to find out what ten sessions of Roling may look like.

Like many Rolfers, Judith Rober divides the sessions into three parts. She calls the first three sessions "The Sleeve." "The sleeve is the mask you put on to the outside world, she says, noting that this is the area of the body where a person stores their tension.

Sessions four through seven are about reaching your core self, or essence – the inner "you" that you may hide from the world. It is where your creativity, aspirations, fears, and painful and precious moments are stored. "One of the main goals of Roling is to divest the sleeve of all that stuff so you can reach its core, so your core ripples through the sleeve," Judith adds.

During the last three sessions, Rolfers usually focus on re-working key areas explored in the first seven meetings.

Session 1

The object is to free your breathing, and the best way to open up breath patterns is for the Rolfer to deeply massage your chest, arms, and hamstrings. "If you

"This form of body work is not without controversy."

The job of the Rolfer is to return those paired muscles to their original, balanced relationship, allowing the rest of the body to be freed from compensating for it. For example, if you twisted your ankle when you were 12, it may feel like it heals completely but actually, your body has adopted a pattern to compensate for that injury, because when the tissue gets damaged it becomes short, dry, and contracted.

Roling differs from other forms of deep structural massage integration like chiropractic, because the Rolfer adjusts the body structure through deep massaging of the soft tissue that covers the muscle and bones, while a chiropractor-

process. Bruises are an all too common by-product of a session, critics contend. But advocates disagree. "If your Rolfer bruises you, it's time to get a new one," Judith says.

Many, like Cindy, swear by the method. Before becoming a Rolfer, Cindy worked as a fashion stylist for a major retailer. On the average, she was on a plane four days a week. Then, she had a car accident. For months, she experienced chronic neck and upper back pain. She went to orthopedists, a rheumatologist, osteopaths, and had a ton of physical therapy, but she was still in pain. Her masseuse finally convinced her to go to a Rolfer.

have free breathing, then the body can be ready for change. People sometimes have a sense of euphoria after the first session," she says.

Indeed, it can be in someone's very first session that they remember pre-verbal trauma, as was the case with *Eleanor, who remembered being intentionally dropped down the basement steps by her uncle when she was two.

Session 2

It's all about support. Most Rolfers work on a person's feet to give the body a

place to stand. The theory is that with a solid foundation, you can begin to make changes above the feet. This is a critical session, since the ultimate goal of Roling is to restore balance, which cannot be achieved without a sound base.

Session 3

Work begins on the sides of your body. Cindy says she tries to establish a "line" from your ear that bisects your ankle, and will help to establish a front-back relationship; the final step to divesting your sleeve.

Session 4

This is the first opportunity the Rolfer has to get into the "trunk" of your body by working on your leg. If you have a painful or embarrassing secret that you have kept hidden from yourself, it will probably start to reveal itself in this ses-

on the front of your body, considered the heart of your core. This area constitutes the space from your breast down to your legs. Beware! If you had the beginning of any self revelations in session four, they usually reveal themselves completely in this session.

Session 6

Enjoy the work on the back of your body.

Session 7

It's time to focus on your head, neck, and shoulders. Sometimes Cindy says she'll double this session, depending on how much injury has been done to the body. Someone who's been hit in the mouth, like a football player, can have all sorts of tensions.

For the last three sessions, both Cindy and Judith return to any troubled areas — and work on these spots "tai-

Session 9

Deeply massage your upper area again, from the waist, up.

Session 10

Prepare to have your outside "stocking" adjusted. "It's a very subtle session," Cindy explains. "There's a lot of movement involved."

In order to maintain your new and improved balanced body structure, Cindy suggests doing Pilates. "It supports the whole balancing of the body and it's something that you as an individual can learn to do on your own," she says. "Yoga's also good, but Pilates is the best."

She also advocates drinking tons of water and stretching. But perhaps the key to maintaining your new found structure is desire. Judith warns that a person will return to her original problem structure if she does not want to change. She saw this most poignantly from working on her patients who suffered from multiple personality disorder. A few times, she even witnessed one of them change personas right in the middle of a Roling session.

"Their whole physical structure completely changed, so there's obviously a link between personality and physical structure. If someone's heavily identified with the way they're used to," says Judith, "they're not going to be happy about changing their structure." But since the majority of her clients choose Roling as a last resort, and the technique may ultimately heal their ailment, they usually will do whatever is necessary after their last session to maintain their status quo.

Cindy agrees, and notes that what her clients do with their lives six months after she has finished Roling them interests her the most. "I'm into physical well being, but I'm mostly intrigued by people who make real life changes as a result of freeing their bodies up. I have seen people make huge life changes after being Rolfed," she says. "Was it just a coincidence? Maybe. But it sure happens a lot." *

**These names have been changed to protect the individual's privacy.*

Session 5

During this meeting the Rolfer focuses

Session 8

Rework your leg area.



sion. If you feel comfortable, you can share this with your Rolfer too, as this may aid in her ability to help heal your physical pain.

lor-made for the individual." But if there are no more major trouble spots, Cindy usually adheres to the following regime for the final three sessions.