

**Looking strong here, runner Annie Love nevertheless needed Rolfing treatments to keep her going.**

gration, is a system of hands-on physical manipulation bodywork and movement education first developed several decades ago by biochemist Ida P. Rolf. Rolfing is designed to produce physical and structural changes within the body, restoring it to its healthiest and most efficient alignment. Rolfing is more participatory than other forms of bodywork. Clients are asked to perform specific movements and are asked to report on what they feel or notice during the session. The results of each session are cumulative and each session builds upon the previous one. Optimum results are achieved within a series of ten sessions that are individually tailored to meet your specific needs.

The ten session Rolfing series is designed to systematically balance your body. The series is broken down into three parts. The first three sessions work to loosen and balance the surface layers of fascia and connective tissue. Sessions four through seven are the core sessions and work the deeper layers. Sessions eight through ten emphasize integration of the work.

Cassel told me that being an athlete for the majority of my life has inevitably taken its toll on my body and that Rolfing would help smooth out my lifelong patterns. A week later I was at Rolfing Eastside for my first Rolfing session. Cassel was very kind and he did a nice job explaining to me what he was doing at all times. The first thing he had me do was stand in my shorts and sports bra so he could check my body alignment. I did a couple of knee bends and lifted my arms up. From those small movements he told me that my calves were a little tight and apparently my knees went toward each other instead of tracking straight (a common thing in woman runners—ed.) which meant the muscles were not differentiated in my quads. Cassel explained that the goal of the first session was to work with my breathing and to get an overall sense of how my body was aligned so he could work on specific problem areas later on.

The Rolfing process felt very much like a deep tissue massage and was not painful at all. When we were finished with the 75-minute session and I stood up my shoulders and neck felt noticeably different. They naturally fell back and felt great. I didn't realize how much I tend to scrunch my shoulders forward. After a couple more deep knee bends (which

# Rolfing for Runners?

Is it really that painful? What can it do for me?

By *Annie Love*

If you have never heard the term "Rolfing", don't feel alone. I had no idea what it meant until recently when a friend suggested that I give it a try to help with my nagging lower back and knee pain. I typically run five miles a day, six days a week for fitness. He told me that Rolfing was a great way to improve my body's alignment and that it would be beneficial for my cyclo-cross season in the fall.

Still a bit doubtful of this process that I had never heard of, I started asking my friends if they had heard of this "Rolfing". Most said no, but others that had said things like, "I heard

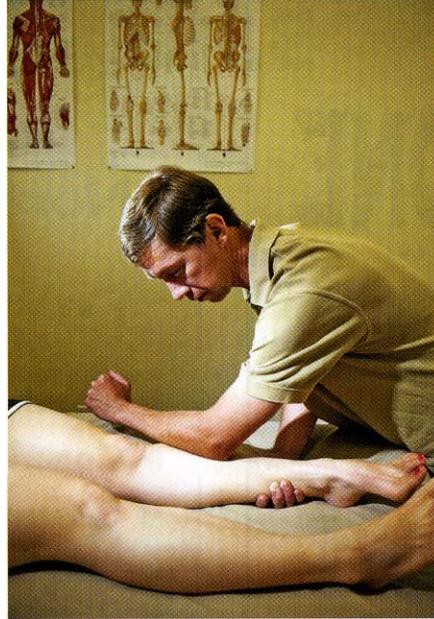
it's deeper then deep" (what does that mean?) and, "it's supposed to be super painful." These comments did not make me feel better, but one friend who is very athletic had been to a couple Rolfing sessions and said that it really opened up his hip and helped improve his athletic performance. So, a couple days later I called Sterling Cassel of Rolfing Eastside in Kirkland, Washington. Cassel assured me that Rolfing has changed over the years and it is no longer painful. He also gave me some background on this little known form of bodywork with an unusual name.

Rolfing, also known as Structural Inte-

showed my knees tracking straighter) I was on my way and looking forward to my next run and Rolfing session.

The next session began with work on my neck and shoulders and expanded to my rib cage. I have never had anyone work on my rib cage before. Cassel explained to me that the fascia in the rib cage gets bound up allowing for less than ideal breathing. Smoothing the fascia out allows the rib cage to expand to greater volume making deeper breathing possible. Once again, when I stood up to leave I was amazed at how good my body felt and how much deeper I was able to breathe.

So far I've only been through three Rolfing sessions but the difference in my body is phenomenal. My posture has improved and most surprising of all running is a lot easier and much more enjoyable. I am able to breathe deeper, strike the ground straight on and I just feel more efficient in my movement. Initially I only wanted to try three sessions to see if Rolfing would even work for me. Now I am planning on doing the entire ten session series. If I can see this much of an improvement after only three sessions, it's exciting to think how much more efficient my body can become and my athletic performance can improve.



**Classic Rolfing technique, working deep to release fascia along the lower leg. PHOTO BY PATRICK LOVE.**

After my sessions with Cassel I did more research on Rolfing specifically related to athletes. I found an article about how Olympic Nordic skier, John Bauer, credits Rolfing for his Olympic success and was so struck by its benefits that he now is a Rolfer. I would encourage any-

one who is a runner or cyclist to try out Rolfing. It is a great way to enhance your performance, reduce injury and improve posture. Many professional sports teams, competitive and recreational athletes incorporate Rolfing as a regular part of their training program to prepare for and recover from strenuous workouts and to enhance overall performance.

#### **When should a runner get a Rolfing session?**

- Between hard workouts, as a regular part of the training schedule if you've pushed hard and wind up with overloaded, sore, stiff and contracted muscles.
- The day before a race. Many runners find a Rolfing session will enhance performance and prevent injury as well as contribute to mental readiness.
- After a race. Rolfing assists the body in getting rid of lactic acid build-up and reduces soreness that can result from overload.
- When an injury occurs or an old injury is slowing you down.

**STERLING CASSEL** of Eastside Rolfing can be contacted at 425.761.3967 or [www.rolfingeastside.com](http://www.rolfingeastside.com).