

# GOOD POSTURE IS LIKE EXPENSIVE UNDERWEAR — YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE MISSING UNTIL YOU GET SOME

**CAN A LITTLE-KNOWN THERAPY LIKE ROLFING REALLY TURN A FORD INTO A JAGUAR? DEE O'KEEFFE DECIDED TO GIVE IT A TRY AND SEE IF IT COULD HELP HER LEARN HOW TO STAND TALL**

**'E**VERY cripple has his own way of walking," said Brendan Behan in less politically-correct times. My own way of walking, for as long as I can remember, is with my shoulders slumped, until my peripheral vision or my mother's voice reminds me to pull those shoulders back and flatten out that hump in my back.

Good posture is like good underwear — you don't really know what you're missing until you actually get some.

And of course, it, the good posture that is, can save you a lot of issues further down the road when Dem Bones ain't as well connected as they used to be.

But I didn't actually know how to stand up straight until I went to see Rolfers Gillian Duffin and Jim McMahon last year.

I'd just pull my shoulders awkwardly back and sit like a poker until I couldn't take it anymore. I might as well have been trying to hold my breath, it felt so unnatural to me.

Now I can do a mean impression of those incredible tribal women who elegantly walk along carrying water on their heads — hips swaying gently from side to side. Because that's how you're supposed to walk when your body is properly aligned.

## WHAT IS ROLFING?

Rolfing is a therapy system created by the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration, founded by Ida Pauline Rolf in 1971. The institute states

Rolfing is a "holistic system of soft tissue manipulation and movement education that organise(s) the whole body in gravity".

According to the Irish Complementary Therapist's Directory (see complementary-therapists.com): "The main aim of Rolfing is to improve health by bringing the various elements of the body, such as the pelvis, into correct alignment. "Rolfers use their elbows, fingers, and knuckles to stretch and open fascia to



**TREATMENT SESSION:** Husband and wife Rolfers Gillian Duffin and Jim McMahon perform four-handed therapy on Dee. And left, Dee (left) with Jim and Gillian

correct the misalignment in the head, shoulders, abdomen, pelvis, and legs. This helps to open up breathing, aids digestion, balances the nervous system, and improves physical and emotional health."

## WHAT'S THE PROCESS

The standard course is 10 sessions, each lasting 75 minutes (90 minutes for the first), but realistically it will be up to every

individual to choose whatever path is right for them. So far I've had five. Each session costs €90.

## MY FIRST TIME

After a wee getting to know you chat with Gillian I climbed on the table and she started to work on my head, neck and shoulder area for this first session.

These areas are a lodestone for trouble and strife as they are typically the places where people carry a lot of stress and tension. I knew instinctively that I could trust Gillian so I completely relaxed.

She focused a lot on the back of my head and, after some time had passed, I felt what I can only describe as a massive 'whosh' of 'something' travel down my body and away from my feet.

It was a very physical sensation accompanied by butterflies in my tummy and even months later I can conjure up the feeling — it happened a second time. Like magic, I had lightened my load.

## THEREAFTER

The sessions are led by your specific needs and goals, so during my second visit I received some deep work on my back and arms which released any lingering baggage that I was feeling.

But there was something very special in store for my third visit — four-handed therapy.

Gillian and her husband Jim worked on me together for an hour-and-a-half — beat that with a stick.

At this point my main area of focus was working on my posture and my legs — particularly an inexplicable kink in my right knee and a lingering sprain in that ankle.

Just before my fourth session I had

decided that I would do the Dublin City Marathon, so on that occasion Jim worked for the most part on my legs and also showed me how to walk — as if I was learning from scratch.

## A BREAKTHROUGH

My eureka moment happened in session five at the end of November, again this was a four-handed session.

Jim was working on my top half but my sturdy little legs, which had indeed got me over the finish line at the marathon, were bothering me. The ankle had more or less sorted itself out, even though I was still wearing a support for my runs.

But my knees felt tired and a bit ruined. I had total trust in Gillian and Jim by this stage of the procedure, so when Gillian started working harder on my knees and hips I went with her — realising for the first time that Rolfing is not entirely passive.

I also revealed to her how worried I was that I had wrecked my joints — it's amazing the dark thoughts we won't voice because we think if we bury our heads in the sand then what we fear will turn out not to be true.

It was my right knee that was giving me the most trouble, but in actual fact my left knee had been very busy compensating, so it

needed more attention.

"Working to release only the painful problem areas is rarely enough," says Gillian.

"When a body is aligned and balanced it moves with greater ease, requiring less energy to function. Good posture and movement is effortless in a balanced, integrated body."

And so we worked on getting me being able to sit on my hunkers and then moved onto my knees, bum resting on the back of my legs the way you do when you are a child playing on the floor.

I got a few more walking lessons before the end, and I finally found out why I slump. It's not my shoulders but my hips that need to adjust so that my body is perfectly in line.

You can see from the iPhone pictures (right) that Gillian took at the end of that session what a massive difference this can help make to my physical wellbeing.

Imagine if I continued forward the rest of my life with my hips jutting forward — how would they cope with putting such immense pressure on my knees?

I've subsequently spoken to some long-time devotees of this little-known therapy which, traditionally, only attracts newbies by word of mouth. They all view Rolfing as a permanent solution to temporary, if long-term or protracted, problems.

I've booked session six and will finish my course of 10 early this year. After that, how I'm feeling will dictate when and if I need to check in again for sessions here and there.

Potential is a word that pops into my head when I think about Rolfing.

If you believe, as I do, that the mind, body and spirit are an interdependent unit then you may also believe that learning to use your physicality properly opens up your potential in an emotional sense too.

That if you use gravity and have an almost imperceptible lean forwards as you walk towards life with your heart open, welcoming what comes your way, with your neck straight and a smile on your face, it means that the inner lodestone might be more likely to attract some of life's good stuff.

That no matter how disillusioned you might be or might get, it's possible for us all to remain open to the quest.

Contacts: Gillian Duffin at [www.loveyourposture.ie](http://www.loveyourposture.ie). Tel: 087 121 9867.

Jim McMahon at [www.jimtherolfer.ie/](http://www.jimtherolfer.ie/) [jimtherolfer@gmail.com](mailto:jimtherolfer@gmail.com) / 086 805 4128

For Irish practitioners: [www.rolfingireland.com](http://www.rolfingireland.com)  
More Rolfing info: [www.rolfing.org](http://www.rolfing.org).



**CHANGE:** Dee's posture before and after the Rolfing sessions

## BODY PROCESS IS NOT LINEAR, IT'S CIRCULAR

FOUNDER of the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration Ida Pauline Rolf (right) was driven to find solutions to her own health problems. She spent many years studying and experimenting with different systems of healing and manipulation.

Below she offers a few wise words about the human body.



would diagnose as a feeling of insecurity or inadequacy unless it is accompanied by a physical situation which bears witness to the fact that the gravitational support is inadequate."

"The body process is not linear, it is circular; always, it is circular. One thing goes awry, and its effects go on and on and on and on."

"When the body gets working appropriately, the force of gravity can flow through. Then, spontaneously, the body heals itself."

"No situation exists in a human which a psychologist

"Rolfing is permanent. As one student put it, after you're Rolfed you're like a Jaguar. No matter how long you drive a Jaguar, it's not going to turn into a Ford."