

Bodywork specialist Frank Epstein, LMT, CNMT, NCT-MB, can be found practicing his profession off the beaten path in a residential neighborhood of Windsor Heights.

Frank says he'd like people to understand the Rolf Method of bodywork called Structural Integration, and that they make it "the first stop instead of the last for pain and stress relief."

Although licensed as a massage therapist, his specialty, the Rolf Method of Structural Integration, was developed by Dr. Ida P. Rolf and became popular in the 1960's. Frank says there are roughly 3,000 practitioners worldwide and in the United States, most practitioners can be found on the East and West Coasts. He tells me he is the only practitioner in Polk County.

So what is Structural Integration? Frank explains it as "a method of manipulating tough connective tissue and reeducating the body through movement and touch to release patterns of stress and impaired function." Although Dr. Rolf's original method was quite aggressive, Frank reports that he and others have modified the approach to suit each client.

Frank explains that he sustained injuries while participating in high school and college sports. Later in life, due to the chronic pain that arose for those injuries, Frank says he underwent Structural Integration therapy, liked it, and thought it would be something he could do as a career.

He consequently enrolled in the Atlanta School of Massage in Atlanta, Georgia in the Integrated Massage and Deep Tissue Therapy program. He recounts his training at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California in Esalen-style Swedish massage. Frank then achieved certification as a Core Structural Integration Therapist from the Core Institute in Tallahassee, Florida. He also continued with training at the Guild for Structural Integration (the traditional school for Dr. Rolf's work) in Boulder, Colorado, and the Rolf Movement Program at the Rolf Institute.

In addition, Frank tells me he completed the Stott Pilates® training program in Toronto, Canada on all the equipment. He is now offering treatments, integrating the Stott Pilates into his Structural Integration practice, which he says he believes will provide his clients with a unique combination of both manual therapy and exercise. Frank explains that he considers the individual goals for the two methods to be similar, simply using two different modalities. "Combining them offers my clients the best of both worlds," he says. He points out that there is more detailed information about the Stott Pilates and Structural Integration programs on his Web site.

Paul Schlueter of Des Moines says Frank's Structural Integration method put him back on track as a runner and triathlete. Paul says he remembered reading an article about Frank's business and Structural Integration a couple of years ago, and later pursued it. Paul, who describes himself as an avid runner and triathlete, says that he has always battled some pain and performance issues.

After completing a half-marathon nearly six months ago, he says he experienced a "total body breakdown." He notes that he had been experiencing chronic pain in his workouts and that his routines were not up to par. He was feeling out of balance, and

went from running 13 miles at a time to only one or two miles. So he decided that he needed something other than periodic massages. At about this time, he came across Frank's name again. He says he decided to give Structural Integration a try.

Paul considers Frank's approach to be "significantly different" from anyone else's. He notes that it is more like "a physical therapist's approach in assessing the body with expert knowledge." Today, Paul undergoes 90 minutes of Structural Integration treatments every two weeks, and says he feels it's a "long-term lifestyle fix." He reports that he is now relatively pain-free and back to his long bike rides and long runs.

It has positively impacted his enjoyment of playing golf and participating in activities with his family, Paul says, adding that he sleeps better and wakes up without chronic pain. He says the changes have been so subtle that he only recently realized he

was waking up pain-free each morning. "I have a better appreciation and understanding of how my body works," Paul says. He claims he is also more aware of his posture, his movements, and how he picks up his children. He adds that he now has a deeper level of understanding of how interconnected everything is and how to sustain that balance.

Frank says "he is most interested in the subtleties that enable people to become more aware of how they carry themselves for better balance and easier movement." He says it is about teaching people to become aware of what they are doing with their bodies. "Any real change is ongoing," he adds.

Frank comments that "Pain occurs when there is an imbalance creating the pain. Structural Integration rebalances the body so you don't have that stress. It is direct work and is not mysterious. Generally, imbalance comes from the feet and works its way up, stopping somewhere and impacting another part of the body."

Among the goals for his clients are pain relief and to improve the body and increase body awareness, he states. "Our culture doesn't do enough of trying to get you back in touch with your own body."

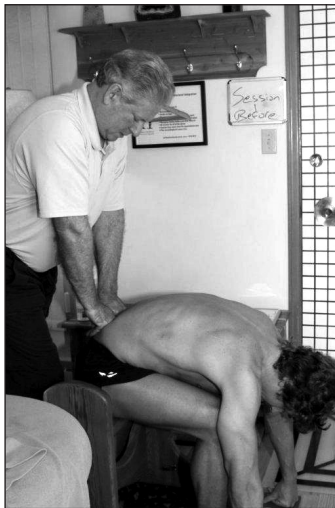
During a Structural Integration session, Frank applies pressure with his hands and arms to elongate and move the tissue to where it should be. "Patterns drive us," Frank says. "For example, when a client has an injured knee, they shift their weight away from the pain, thus creating an imbalance."

Frank shares with me his excitement about being able to offer his clients the unique combination of Structural Integration, bodywork, and Stott Pilates into a single session. He says he truly believes this will make for a more structurally integrated person. Although Frank says he prefers practicing these newly integrated sessions, he also offers other bodywork treatments, like massage. He continues, saying that he will always offer his clients an honest evaluation of what modalities he feels will best help them achieve the results they desire.

Frank has been practicing in the Des Moines area for more than 10 years. Learn more about the Rolf Method of Structural Integration, Stott Pilates, and Frank's fees and policies at www.rolfmethodbodywork.com. Contact Frank by phone at 515-274-3417 or by e-mail at frank@rolfmethodbodywork.com. An appointment is necessary as he does not accept walk-in clients. **WE**

FRANK EPSTEIN: Finding Balance and Fighting Gravity

By Susan Masid



Frank Epstein with professional
Tri-Athlete, T.J. Tollakson