

The Rossiter System

Stretching the Pain Away

By Shirley Vanderbilt

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Our bodies have no hidden agenda, they're not like politicians," says stretching guru Richard Rossiter. "They want to tell you what's happening so you can correct it." Rossiter is a bodyworker on a mission. His goal? Fewer people on the operating table and more people on the floor stretching away their pain.

We all have our aches and pains. Some may be caused by serious injury, but it's usually the things we do day to day that get us. Pain is a source of information, Rossiter says. "There's no structural pain out there that we didn't cause ourself." Like the way we work at the computer, or the way we move, or don't move. When we can make a connection between pain and what we have or haven't done, we can more accurately tackle the problem and resolve it.



In the Rossiter System, the person in charge (PIC) lies on the floor while the coach places a foot on a specified area.

Rossiter has developed a two-person stretching program that not only alleviates structural pain but can prevent its occurrence. While the most common complaints he encounters with clients involve the back, neck, and shoulders, there's a hefty sprinkling of other stressed areas such as knees, elbows, wrists, and feet. These areas are frequently targeted for elective surgery to "cut out" the source of the pain. But Rossiter says structural pain is a symptom, not a diseased organ or a tumor. Surgery is fine, in fact it may be necessary if you have cancer, for example. Yet, surgery for structural pain can not only miss the underlying cause, but can also leave the body permanently damaged.



Lock - Done with nearly every Rossiter technique, the Lock engages connective tissue from head to toe on one side of the body.

“It’s important for a person to investigate for themselves all avenues for getting rid of pain,” Rossiter says. “Surgery should be the last thing they do. There are so many different ways for their body to be healed without being cut on. It’s like an insult to the body to cut before investigating.” Whether you choose Rossiter’s stretching system, or some other form of massage or bodywork, give your body a chance to do what it knows how to do — heal itself.

Most of our daily aches and pains are related to connective tissue, that network of fascia, ligaments, and tendons that more or less holds the body together. “It’s like millions of strings that interact with each other on every plane,” Rossiter says. In its ideal state, connective tissue is flexible, neither too loose nor too tight. “When you cut into the body for surgery of any kind, it immediately sends out a signal to glue itself back together and that’s scar tissue. It’s the same as putting a piece of cloth in there; it stops the flow of information throughout the body.”

A better approach, he suggests, is the nonsurgical one of stretching connective tissue that has become too tight or too short. “When a person is under tremendous stress, it’s like a slow, deliberate trauma being delivered to the body.” Continued stress, whether emotional or physical, can tighten connective tissue to the point where pain is experienced throughout the body. Just the simple act of walking can start the process of loosening up the connective tissue and give body parts and systems the space they need to function properly.



Upper Calf Crunch - One of the few Rossiter techniques to be done on a chair, it quickly eases knee and calf pain.

Rossiter says the whole goal of his stretching program is to recreate the body's originally designed space. But he accomplishes this in a most unusual way, with the use of a foot, a coach, and a person in charge (PIC). The coach and PIC work together as partners, but it's the responsibility of the PIC to do the stretching. When Rossiter began his career as a Rolfer (a type of bodyworker who structurally reintegrates the connective tissue system with hands-on work), he noticed that the clients who participated in the process were the ones who improved. "If they wanted to maneuver their body to help me get the pain and the problem out, they got better results than just lying there," he says. That realization led to the development of his partnership model, where the coach supports the PIC through a series of stretching movements. Where does the foot come in? It belongs to the coach and it's used to provide weight and warmth to the tissue. Remember Silly Putty? When you warm and knead it with your hands, it becomes moldable and stretchy — that's what happens with connective tissue, too.



Forearm up - Good for hand and wrist pain, this is the first of the six upper-body techniques in Level I of the Rossiter System.

"I like to think of myself, as coach, as the second-most knowledgeable person in the room," Rossiter says. "The PIC knows more about their body. I know the approximate area to go to, but they are the authority." In the stretching workout, the PIC lies on the floor while the coach places a foot on a specified area. The PIC then assumes the "lock," a position that gives the stretch its full power. In essence, the foot is just dumb weight, Rossiter says. The effectiveness of the technique rests primarily with the PIC's focus and determination to stretch the pain away.

In a lock, the PIC has the legs extended with toes pulling toward the torso, one arm swept to the side with palm out and fingers pointed to the ceiling, and the head rolled down with nose pointed to the shoulder. The arm and head positioning is done on the side of the body opposite the area being worked, but allows the stretch to affect the entire body. If the lock sounds uncomfortable, don't worry. The stretches are accomplished quickly, in three repetitions of only 10 seconds each, and an entire workout can be completed in as little as 20 to 30 minutes.



Ham Jam - Helps ease knee pain and loosen the hamstring. All Rossiter System techniques are two-person stretches that loosen and elongate connective tissue.

There are 10 levels of workouts in the Rossiter System, as well as supplemental techniques targeting areas of the back, knees, feet, and hands. When you max out at one level, you can take it up a notch to a more powerful stretch, or you can stay at a lower level if that works for you. The important thing, Rossiter says, is to build a sense of confidence and safety. The stretches are brief, and the results are immediate.

In 1989, Rossiter started his workshops by going into factories, a common site for work-related injury and stress. With just a small core group of workers trained as coaches, the techniques could be taught to and implemented by other employees, resulting in a decrease of work-injury related absenteeism. But it's not just for factory workers anymore. Anyone with a partner can practice these techniques. The whole kit and caboodle is laid out, with instructional photographs, in a book co-authored with his partner Sue MacDonald, titled *Surgery Sucks!!!! Fix Your Body Without Needles, Knives, Scalpels, 'Scopes, Lasers ... or Other Sharp Stuff!* The title itself reflects the wit and entertainment within, but the work is serious and takes commitment.



Hole in the Shoulder - One of the most powerful stretches for opening the shoulder girdle and relieving upper back and shoulder pain.

Rossiter says that first you have to aggressively want to get rid of your pain. And you have to be able to get down on the floor and back up without help. That has to do with both mobility and motivation. Among contraindications are cancer within the past five years, surgery within six months, and pacemaker or breast implants. Because surgery changes the natural state of body

tissue, if you've already had back surgery, the low-back techniques will not be effective. But you can still benefit from the upper-body stretches. It's better than no stretch at all.

Our bodies were designed to move and stretch, Rossiter says. "Start walking. That's the one thing I always tell people about what's important. Whatever you're doing right now in life, choose what you want to do when you're 80 years old. You can't start at 79."

For more information on the Rossiter System, visit www.rossiter.com.