Brooke Buzzi is in the business of pain relief. Clients who come to Buzzi have usually tried everything else, and are still experiencing pain. They are tired of the limitations of traditional pain relief treatments and are looking for a therapeutic approach. That’s when they investigate Rolfing®.

“Rolfing is a hands-on method of bodywork that uses slow and sustained pressure,” said Buzzi, a Certified Advanced Rolfer with Oregon Health & Science University’s Comprehensive Pain Center in Portland. “The goal is to release tension and bracing in the body in order to move more fluidly.”

When someone experiences an injury or develops a bad posture habit like slumping at a desk, the body can get stuck in a pattern that can cause problems or create new ones.

“For example, if you sprain an ankle, you may limp for a while,” Buzzi said. “The injury heals, but the body keeps the limp. The nervous system has locked into a holding pattern to avoid the pain of the injury, even after it is better. Using touch therapy, Rolfing helps open up a person’s posture and awareness, empowering his or her self-healing.”
According to Buzzi, Rolfing can relieve chronic muscle pain, improve range of motion, and reduce anxiety and headaches. Common issues among her clientele are low-back pain, frozen shoulder, neck and shoulder tension, repetitive motion injuries, and postural problems.

A Rolfing session should be a soothing and enjoyable experience, Buzzi believes. She discusses the goal for each person and then assesses posture while standing, sitting and walking.

“There are a lot of ‘ah-ha’ moments when people think about their bodies in noncritical ways,” Buzzi says. “I use a mirror a lot in sessions. For example, I’ll notice that someone is holding one shoulder higher than the other. When clients see the difference in the mirror, they are often surprised.”

Most clients will experience some change in how they feel immediately after a session, Buzzi said. Though some come in for one session, most clients opt for a series of sessions to address a particular goal.

Buzzi shared a story of a client with a repetitive motion injury who was considering surgery for pain relief. A friend recommended she try Rolfing first. Buzzi worked with the woman for four months. Ultimately, the patient chose to forego surgery and was able to stop taking the pain-related medications she had been using.

Rolfing, properly known as Rolfing Structural Integration, was developed in the 1920s by Dr. Ida P. Rolf, an American biochemist and early holistic thinker. Over the past century, the practice has become refined.

“In the past, Rolfing was known as being very intense and using deep pressure,” said Buzzi. “But through pain science and more clinical knowledge, we know bodies don’t change when forced. Now, we use a listening touch to influence the nervous system. The bodywork is always very slow and it should never bring any anxiety. However, changing patterns can be mentally and emotionally challenging.”

Dr. Kim Mauer, medical director of the Comprehensive Pain Center at OHSU, views Rolfing as a positive addition to the complementary therapies the center embraces.

“We are moving away from medication to solve chronic pain,” Mauer said. “In fact, taking regular medicine reinforces the idea of being sick. We want to help patients move from medication to healthier lifestyle options as a long-term strategy.”

Mauer believes Rolfing adds another option for people seeking to manage and treat pain.

“Rolfing will be beneficial for our patients with myofascial pain, arthritis, de-conditioned muscles and injuries,” she said. “I also think it will be great for our cancer patients with tension and stress in their bodies.”