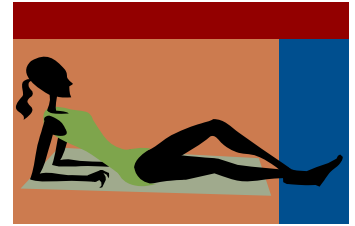


# The Core Myth



Jon Burras

Fads come and fads go. In a rapidly changing world we are often swept up by the latest craze to capture our attention. Cultures are guided by the newest styles and beliefs that have developed right in front of them. Businesses might shift their focus to what is popular in order to ride the waves of success.

As technology and beliefs continue to change so do the ways we approach our bodies. A swarm of attention has been brought to the core of the body recently. From celebrity actresses to sedentary house wives the latest craze has been to focus on tightening the “core”. This practice can be seen in such activities as fitness training, Pilates, and even some yoga classes. Scores of new videos and a host of high-tech equipment have helped to elevate this explosion to its current status in popularity.

Without meaning to seem a bit rude, has anyone ever stopped to question what the “core” is anyways and what this new fitness revolution might actually be doing to the body? There is a general misconception about what the core is among most people. This misconception has led to a faulty understanding of the body and an errant application of this belief.

In the minds of most the core is thought of as a place that needs to be protected and hardened. This belief states that a firm core protects one’s back and allows for a greater sense of health. It is commonly believed that the deep muscles near the spine as well as the abdominal muscles in front need to be hard and tight if one is to achieve any sense of healthy living. As a surprise to many this belief is not true nor does strengthening the core actually do much to make one any healthier. In fact, a hardened core is often a detriment to one’s health and only leads to problems down the road.

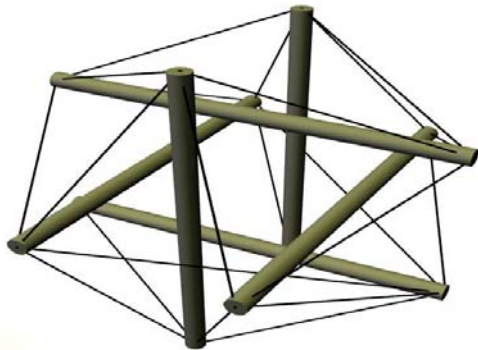
The belief that the core needs to be hardened comes to us by way of a mechanistic and warrior approach to life. This model has prompted us to believe that fitness and health are interchangeable elements and are accomplishing the same goals. They are not. Health is about the proper functioning of all major body systems. Fitness is concerned with shaping one’s physique to appear a certain way. These two practices are entirely separate and rarely cross-over to affect the other. **(For more information see; [JonBurras.com/articles/Health or Fitness](http://JonBurras.com/articles/Health%20or%20Fitness).)**

The fitness approach to the core is based on the structural model that most buildings are built with. This model states that blocks are stacked on top of each until you reach your desired height. Under this philosophy the base of the model will carry the most weight. This model wants us to believe that the bones of our body are these building blocks and are actually holding us up. They are not.

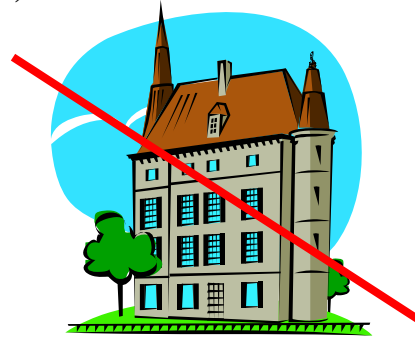
The body is designed more like a tensegrity model than a building. The bones are merely spacers for the muscles and connective tissue to anchor onto. The muscles and connective tissue act as guy wires to pull the bones away from each other and lift us upright. If the body were comprised of a series of building blocks it would be just like

every other building- immobile. The last time I checked bodies move and buildings are stationary.

By tightening the core you are actually creating more imbalances in an already imbalanced system. Most back pain does not originate from a “weak core”, as this fitness model contends. Instead, most back pain begins with one or more of these muscle and connective tissue cables being out of balance. Only by bringing balance back to the body will one achieve health. More tightness to an already tight system is not the answer. (See; [JonBurras.com/articles/Backs Do Not Just Go Out.](http://JonBurras.com/articles/Backs%20Do%20Not%20Just%20Go%20Out.))



**The body is more like a tensegrity model with the muscles acting as cables to allow the body to move.**

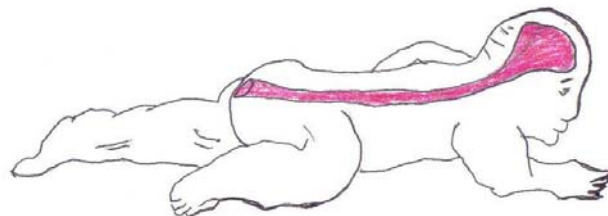


**The body is not like a building with blocks stacked on top of one another. Buildings do not move.**

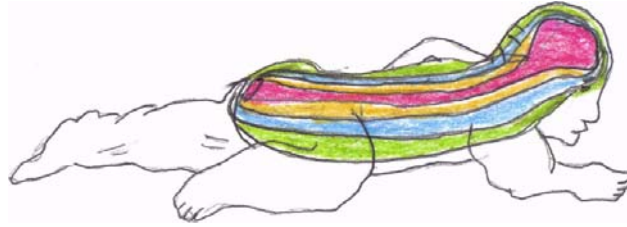
This misconception of the body and the core was developed to achieve nothing more than a flat stomach and a trim waist line. As many in the population age they often experience difficulty accepting changes to their bodies. Driven by celebrity gossip magazines and prime time television entertainment shows most people have been led to believe that a flat and hard abdomen is the model of a healthy body. It is not. Most cultures that are not media obsessed do not concern themselves with the hardness of their bellies. They also do not suffer from many of the same maladies that a hardened core might produce.

### **What exactly is the core?**

When we examine the core we must look at how the body first developed. From the very first egg and sperm to unite our core begins to form. This coming together of early cells forms what is called, “The Primal Tube”. The primal tube is the “core” of who we are. Many of our primal instincts come directly from the core, including our Relaxation and Stress Responses. The core contains all the vital information for us to complete our development and grow up to be a healthy adult.



**The Primal Tube of a newborn child**



**Many Layers Develop to Surround the Primal Tube**

As we continue to develop the primal tube remains intact and subsequent layers of tissue and organs begin to develop around it. Even as we get older the primal tube does not go away. We begin to experience life from many layers that resemble the characteristics of an onion. Even though we have many layers to draw awareness from the core remains alive and functioning.

The adult core has the same primal tissues and embryonic knowledge as a fetus or newborn. This is a liquid and energetic cascade of information that flows from the brain to the tailbone. A river of life, the core has many duties and vital responsibilities to not only keep us alive but to create optimum health and wellness.

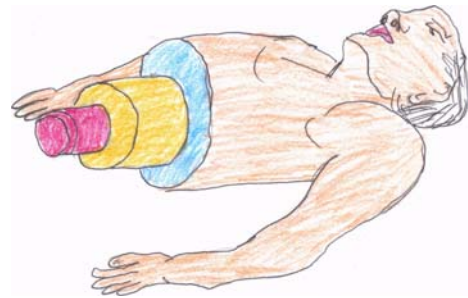


Imagine a redwood tree that lives to a ripe old age. This gigantic tree begins its life journey as a tiny sapling with a liquid-like center. Sap and nutrients travel through the core to reach all aspects of the tree. As the tree grows rings of growth are added around the core each year. Even as the tree grows to an advanced age the core continues to provide the necessary nutrients for life.

The human body is not much different than a large redwood tree when it comes to the core. Our core is a vital part of our existence. Without the core we would die. Just like the tree that cannot move nutrients through its center anymore we dry up and perish as well if our core is not allowed to fulfill its mission.



**Tree Rings**



**Layers around the Primal Tube**

## Rivers of the Core

The human core or primal tube consists of many rivers that continue to affect the entire body. You may even think about the core as a giant plumbing system for the body. For maximum health each river that flows through the core must continue to move unobstructed. From the primal tube originated many different systems that have continued to evolve as we age. Every core system is unique yet connected to the other systems. Each of these systems will now be explored individually.

### The Neural Tube

Out of the primal tube developed the central nervous system. This has also been called the neural tube. The neural tube contains the nerve fibers that travel up and down the spine and connect with the periphery nervous system that feeds into the arms and legs. The flow of nerve impulses is responsible for many important bodily functions. These functions include digestion, respiration, sexual function, and many others. The central nervous system is an extension of the brain. One could make the argument that the brain is not just in the skull but operates far outside the cranial cavity.



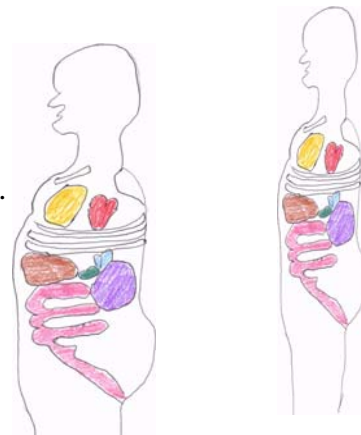
The central nervous system occupies part of the core. As nerves travel down through the spine any impingement in this area could lead to disruptions in other functions of the body. This is the general theory of how chiropractic health care operates. For instance, if a nerve within the neural tube is impinged due to tightness and contraction in the surrounding muscles and connective tissue health becomes compromised. Excess stomach acid may be secreted causing indigestion or an ulcer. Urinary or sexual function may be hampered. Any organ or gland could be negatively impacted because the core has been excessively tightened and a nerve constricted.

One might even speculate that many of the common organ problems of our time might originate from a frozen core and a nerve impingement someplace along the spine. Proper functioning of the body would entail finding the central cause of the blockage. Taking pills to minimize the symptoms will not heal any restrictions found at the core.

### The Digestive System

Imagine a garden hose in your backyard. When left open the water flows unimpeded through the hose. Try creating a kink in the hose and see what happens. The flow of water will be reduced. The pressure will build up on the walls of the hose, weakening it over time. Cracks in the hose will then appear.

The digestive system is not much different than a backyard garden hose. The digestive system is a tube that runs from the mouth to the anus.



Open digestive system

Closed digestive system

Nutrients are delivered to the body and waste products are removed through the digestive system.

Excess compression to the core will cause the digestive system to back up. This could lead to constipation, bloating, menstrual problems, or other maladies. As this internal tube of nutrients becomes squeezed and compressed by the surrounding muscles the free flow through the intestines becomes reduced. Fewer nutrients will then be able to be absorbed. The greater the pressure and tightness the more the build up of waste products. Toxins are then reabsorbed into the body when they are not eliminated.

A tightened core is anything but good for the digestive system. As the core muscles harden and tighten the integrity of the internal plumbing becomes jeopardized. It appears that many people would rather have a flat stomach than have their bodies function properly. Constipation and endometriosis do not happen by accident. A flat abdomen is a repressed center. A tight core is more about cosmetic appearance than about health.

### **The Cranial Sacral System**



Deep within the core of the body lives a profound and marvelous liquid river called the Cranial Sacral System. This river of fluid pulses out the center of the brain every seven to twelve seconds as it traverses down the center of the spine into the tailbone. This liquid is called, “Cranial Sacral Fluid”, or “CSF”. The fluid pressure of this system pushes the cerebral spinal fluid back up the spine where it is recirculated into the brain.

The importance of the Cranial Sacral System is immense. This river of fluid allows the entire body to slowly pulsate at a regular rhythm. This internal primal beat is a regulatory system for many of the body’s other systems. As this fluid is allowed to flow unimpeded on its journey the health of the body is maintained.

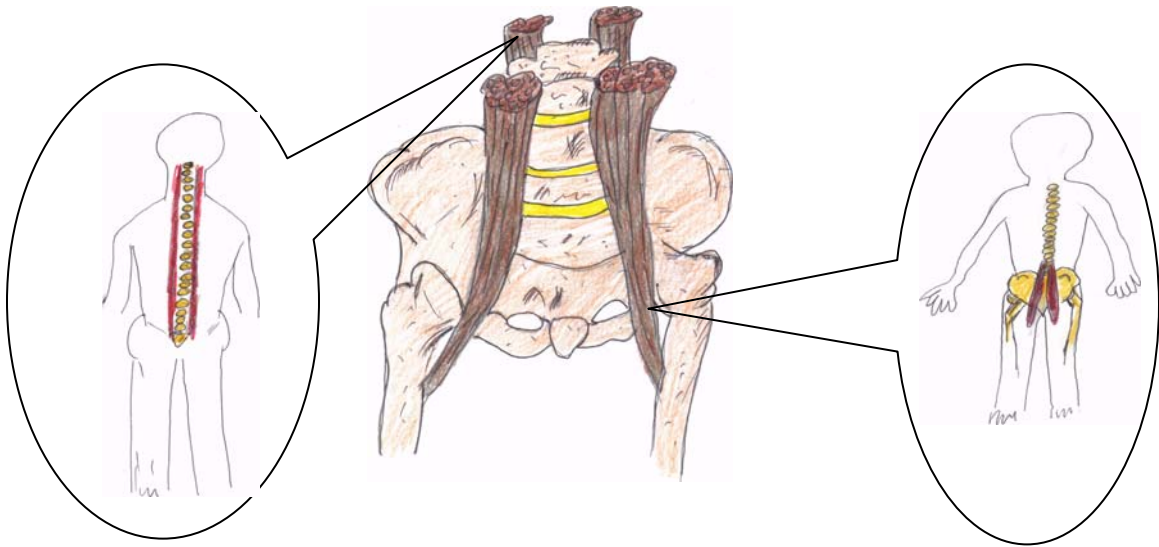
A core that is trained to remain hard and tight will inevitably hamper the ability of the Cranial Sacral System to flow smoothly. Headaches, depression, insomnia, and mental disorders are some of the potential results when the cerebral spinal fluid is blocked. As the core of the body becomes hardened the affects can be felt throughout the extremities.

### **The Structural Body**

Hardening the core does not cure back problems. Hardening the core does not solve hip pain. Hardening the core does not create more flexibility for the body. The structural body is actually weakened when the core remains frozen.

Muscles need to move to remain healthy. A muscle that is hyper-tonic will weaken because it remains locked in place. A healthy muscle needs to be able to relax. As the core muscles are trained to remain hard to pull the abdomen in these muscles will weaken over time.

As the core hardens the structural integrity of the pelvis and back muscles often comes into question. One does not create health by hardness and tightness. One creates health by bringing balance back to the body. A hardened core often reflects a body out of balance.



**Erector Spinae Muscles**  
*Back of the Body*

**Psoas Muscle**  
*Front of the Body*

The Psoas muscle and the Erector Spinae group of muscles act like a vice to support the lower spine and central nervous system. Any excess tightness or hardness here will lead to complications in the spine. One such complication is Sciatica. This condition occurs when one or both sides of these muscle groups remain out of balance and chronically tightened and shortened. Exercises to strengthen the core do very little to help release this tightness and only reinforce an imbalanced structure. If something is already tight why does one believe that more tightness is going to fix it? Hardening something does not necessarily mean improving it.

### **The Energetic System**

Arising from the center of the body is a powerful flow of energy often referred to as “Kundalini”. This fountain of energy has tremendous potential for healing and spiritual growth. This source of energy is also called the Chakra System. The Chakra System refers to several primary “balls” of rotating energy that become energized from the core. While not able to be measured using scientific instruments this energy source has been written about and documented in many cultures for thousands of years.

This core of energy has been defined as a central channel of ancient wisdom. It may be difficult for a culture that spends so much time in its head to understand that wisdom can come in many forms, including a column of pulsating energy. Many cultures that are not influenced by media propaganda honor and respect the wisdom that lives at the core.

Imagine a current of electricity that flows through a copper wire. This free flow of current will move rapidly through the wire unimpeded. Now imagine trying to send a current of electricity through a rubber tire. Rubber is a denser material and the current will not be able to flow.

When one continuously tightens and hardens the core he willing prevents this source of energy from expanding. As blockages occur in the energy system physiological



changes often occur. Disturbances in the energetic core of the body can lead to many different imbalances.

When one strategically practices “core tightening exercises” on a continual basis he is blocking this flow of energy through the core. Wisdom that lives at this energetic center is prevented from moving and stagnation occurs. The fitness model of core tightening, while not yet fifty years old, has attempted to stifle ancient wisdom thousands and thousands of years old. Honoring the core means respecting this flow of central energy through the body.

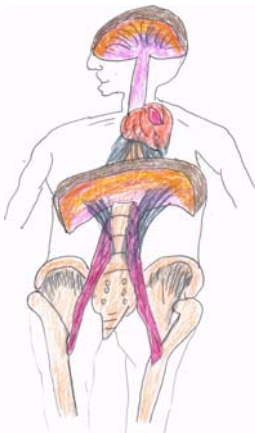
### The Breath

At the core of the body lives the diaphragm, the primary muscle of respiration. This large muscle attaches to the underside of the rib cage and spinal cord and provides up to 70% of the muscle activity used in breathing. The proper use of the lungs demands that the diaphragm be free.

Constant tightening and hardening of the abdominal muscles to present a flat and rigid stomach will only lead to a diaphragm that is contained in its job. Just like a tight waist band will prevent one from breathing efficiently a hardened abdomen and a tight core will also do the same. Imagine living life with a series of bands tied around your waist and chest constricting the free flow of movement of your torso. A tightened abdomen is just such a band.

The lungs are the means in which the body absorbs oxygen into the cells and removes carbon dioxide. The lungs do not move by themselves but require the action of the respiratory muscles to make this happen. The diaphragm, being the largest of these muscles, requires freedom of movement for the body to receive adequate oxygen intake. Tight and constricted core and abdominal muscles will certainly prevent this from happening.

As the muscles of respiration become hampered in their job of moving the rib cage and the lungs less air is allowed to enter into the lungs. Over time as this process continues less oxygen will enter the cells. This could lead to other complications like tiredness, infection, or disease.



The diaphragm is also connected to the heart through a series of connective tissue connections. When the diaphragm is hindered the heart muscle is also compromised. Could it be that most heart disease can be attributed to a tightened core?

For the heart and diaphragm to be healthy both of these organs need to be able to move freely. The heart is pulled along by the action of the diaphragm and massaged in the process. This sea-saw action of the heart and the

diaphragm works best when both are free of hardened muscles and connective tissue that may surround them.

As the core muscles remain hard this internal pull is transferred through the connective tissue of the core. As this occurs there is less energy to the heart and the connective tissue around the heart begins to harden and shorten. The pericardium, the connective tissue sheath around the heart, begins to strangle the heart muscle within. While Western medicine has remained fixated on the cholesterol myth as the reason for heart disease a very real possibility is that the hardened core has hampered the effectiveness of the diaphragm to move freely and restricted the complete movement of the heart. **For more information see; [JonBurras.com/articles/](http://JonBurras.com/articles/) The Heart Has Become a Weapon for War.**

### **Stress and the core**

As we emerge from our cocoon as a fetus we are vulnerable to new experiences. The core of us is ripe for imprinting. At the core we are offered a choice of establishing a belief that we feel safe in the world or that the world is a scary and hostile place. Through our gestation period, birth, and the first year of life this new belief will become established.

Due to mechanistic views of birth and babies most people are imprinted with the belief at their core that they do not feel safe in the world and the world is a hostile environment. When this happens they tighten and harden at their core. This imbedded terror becomes a catalyst for many dysfunctional patterns that will develop in years to come. This includes addictions, mental health disorders, and disease.

As we have seen the core is a living river of information and wisdom. Once a belief becomes established here that one does not feel safe there is an external hardening of the tissues around this area to contain this terror and not let it out. When this happens it becomes very difficult for one to relax.

The core presents us with a unique opportunity. We can either find peace in our lives or chaos. The initial belief stored in the core will determine this outcome. The core, being part of the old Reptilian System, is where our Fight or Flight Response is stored. This ancient response is often locked in the “on” position for many people and seldom shuts off. When in the “on” position we seldom feel safe within our own skin and are constantly worried about being attacked. This attack could be real or imaginary.

A tight core is a body under stress. In a healthy and balanced individual feeling should radiate up and down the spine as well as from the center outward. A tight core is symbolic of a body at war with itself. As the fitness model has crept in to masquerade as health many who practice this philosophy are using contractive movements to contain the terror that they have stored at their core. It often becomes very difficult for this type of individual to ever relax and achieve a state of peace because they spend their efforts preventing this wave of emotion from being released from their center. The fitness model does very little to produce relaxation and only helps to keep one more entrenched in the war within themselves.

Genuine health and healing happens when one is able to free up the feelings and beliefs stored at the core, rather than building up walls of armor around them. It might be stated that those practicing this model might have the most difficulty in relaxing. They are restless and do not sleep well at night. They rely on drugs and other addictive measures to moderate their moods. This occurs because they have been unwilling to feel



and release the terror stored at their core. This often leads to a life strategy of needing to be in control at all times so this demon that lives within will never come out.

### **How to heal from the core**

This misguided belief about the core comes to us from a culture that is disconnected from nature and our natural origins. Many believe that nature is something that you go to visit when you are tired of being in the city. However, we are just as much a part of nature as the dolphins and the palm trees. Honoring our relationship with nature is the beginning.

It is not difficult to access the core. In order to heal one must make a commitment to feel and stop repressing the wisdom that lives at the core. It is important to begin to honor the feelings and emotions that flow out from the core.

One does not have to give up completely his or her fitness routine. It may be important to begin to question the beliefs that you have about health and exercise. Is this really doing what it claims? Are you really any healthier? Why is having a flat and hard stomach more important than the optimal functioning of your body? Are you more concerned with how you look on the outside than how you feel on the inside? Are you learning misguided beliefs from a teacher or trainer who himself remains frozen at his core and he is only passing on his terror to you?

One may want to learn how to contact the core- while lifting a box or in a yoga pose- but certainly not 24 hours a day. There is nothing wrong with toning the body, as long as it includes a comprehensive health practice. Health occurs when all of the body's systems are allowed to flow freely. This includes the digestive system, emotional system, energy system, and many others. Health is a dynamic interplay between the many rivers of the body. Who came up with the notion that health was about creating and maintaining a flat abdomen? This belief originated from a host of sources, including the media and the fashion industry.

A practice that is based on hardening and tightening the body only creates the illusion of health and may be the farthest thing from health. The many layers of the body are meant to expand and contract. A rigid tube leads to inflexibility and blockages. Here are some of the preferred ways to open the core.

#### **1. Bodywork**

There are many different types of bodywork that achieve different goals. Connective tissue bodywork is a good place to start. This method will begin to release hardened areas of the body. This can be found in such work as Rolfing, Hellerwork, or Intuitive Connective Tissue Bodywork. Another form of bodywork that releases from the core is Cranial Sacral. This is a very light and gentle system that balances the interplay between the many inner layers of the body.

Gentle chiropractic is another way to balance the core by freeing up the restrictions around the nervous system. NSA, (Network Spinal Analysis), is an energetic type of bodywork practiced by many holistic chiropractors. This technique is a way to free up internal layers of the body by utilizing energy to do so. Another effective form of bodywork is NET, (Neuro Emotional Technique). This approach asks the body where the blockage lies and frees up the many pathways to that blockage. This technique is also utilized by many holistic chiropractors.

## **2. Expansive Movement**

Most movement in Western culture is contractive movement, designed to tighten and harden the body. This is not health and does very little to heal anything. When one engages in a healing routine one must begin to use expansive movement systems. One of the foremost of these systems is the ancient practice of yoga. Yoga is designed to warm the body from the inside out and then stretch the tissue like taffy.

It is important when practicing yoga to practice from the inside out. Take the fitness part out of yoga and move from the core first. For instance, when practicing a twist do so not from the outside but let your many layers move around the center of your body. This is where the most changes will occur. Practicing Kundalini yoga may also be very helpful. This brand of yoga attempts to create movement along the spine.

Some other expansive movement practices are Continuum and Feldenkrais. These gentle movement systems begin to get one in touch with the many layers buried at the core. While rather gentle in nature they have a profound impact on the body.

## **3. Emotional Release**

Emotions are a natural form of energy that needs to flow out of us. When repressed the energy of our emotions will linger in us, often creating physiological changes in the body. Freeing oneself of these emotions becomes an integral part of opening up the core.

The core holds our deepest reactions to fear. This fear needs to be released to be healthy. A core that holds tightly around this fear is like a damned up river. Learning to release one's core means learning to express long held emotions, not just a tear or two, but a full body release.

### **Conclusion**

The fad of a tight and hard core has swept us over without ever questioning its impact on us. Isn't it time that we took back our beliefs and followed nature's healing way. In an externally driven culture where one often feels happy when attaining a fancy car or expensive dress it is easy to see how we have become disconnected.

The core is a river of life. Western culture has turned the core into a sea of death. Are you willing to finally discover the peace within by removing yourself from war? Are you still driven by a fabricated belief that a flat and hard abdomen exemplifies health? Living from the core means living from a sense of peace. Only when you remove the hardened layers around your core and return to natural beliefs will you be able to experience this long-lasting peace.

### **Resources**

**Rolfing Bodywork (Rolf.org)**

**The Rolf Guild of Structural Integration (Rolfguild.org)**

**Hellerwork (Hellerwork.com)**

**Upledger Institute Cranial Sacral Therapy (upledger.com)**

**NSA Network Spinal Analysis (associationfornetworkcare.com)**

**NET Neuro Emotional Technique (netmindbody.com)**

**Feldenkrais (Feldenkrais.com)**

**Continuum (continuummovement.com)**

**"Emotional Anatomy" (Stanley Keleman)**

**JonBurras.com**