

Structural Integration (S.I.)

What is Structural Integration?

S.I. is a method of bodywork that uses myofascial release as its application method to help bring about better alignment to a persons' posture. The process of S.I. is delivered over 12 one and a half hour sessions, spaced approximately one to two weeks apart.

Myofascial release is a hands-on therapy used by a professional bodyworker. Instead of oil a little bit of soft wax or water will be used so that the therapist can make the proper connection with the various layers of tissue that they wish to effect and help unbind.

As a fully trained S.I. practitioner I have done over 500 hours of face to face learning and many more hours of in depth anatomy study before being allowed to practice under this title. The training involves many hours of body reading so that I can discern how your body pattern is effecting the lines of tension and compression within the connective tissue system. I am also interested in how you use your body when you move and what essential events in the kinetic chain are happening well and not so well when you walk.

What can S.I. do for you?

My honest answer to this is I don't know what S.I. will do for you because besides the structural integrity that is the more obvious aim of a 12-session series the more profound effects of it are very different for each individual. However, I do recognise that committing to a 12-session series of treatments is a big investment in both time and money and attached to this article is **a run-down and the aim of each session.**

The more profound effects of S.I. are varied. Please read on if this interests you or skip to the attachment of the series details if not.

Pain and S.I.

Touch is a distraction to the nerve pathways that communicate the message to the brain that something is wrong; a stress,

mechanical or emotional to the system which is perceived as pain. Myofascial release is an excellent method of touch which brings fluidity back to the adhesions that are created over time through trauma and/or misuse. Over time, if an injury is not dealt with effectively many other areas become involved. These chronic health issues vary from the obvious to the not so obvious. For instance, a badly or non-rehabilitated shoulder injury leads to misuse of the muscles in the neck and arm as a person establishes new ways of using the arm to prevent pain. This leads to unhelpful patterns of tension within the layers of connective tissue that surround not only the muscles and joints in the immediate area but other distant structures, such as the 'bags' that surround the organs as the person develops inefficient patterns of alignment. A long-term shoulder problem may affect someone's capacity to breath well, affecting their energy level and ability to function well psychologically.

The unproved

Muscles hold memory. We know this through research ⁽¹⁾ which has established that muscles that have lost their mass but previously been large can regain their mass faster than those muscles that do not have that history. The link between the rekindling of a memory to someone's conscious mind through the release of held muscle contraction has not been proved. However, I can tell you that anecdotal evidence, especially from those practicing structural integration, suggests that some kind of memory is held in tissues and occasionally when a person receives bodywork these memories can be triggered. This can be something as simple as someone remembering that they felt very embarrassed when as a 11-year-old they had to wear some kind of support because of an injury.

The sense of lift that is created within the tissues through S.I. work can change a persons' overall sense of wellbeing, sometimes quite dramatically, which will likely make changes to the way a person thinks about situations and interacts with the world.

There are many other ways in which S.I. affects a person and can have remarkable outcomes but the above two examples give you an idea that the process of a 12-session series of treatments is not about chasing pain but rather unwinding a

persons' pattern so they can be more resilient to and deal with stress to their system more effectively and make them the best person they can be at that time.

(1) <http://jeb.biologists.org/content/219/2/235.eLetters>

KMI Structural Integration

The Series Details

Pre the 12-series.

We are about to embark on a bit of journey together and as the one that is going to guide you through this I have duty of care to make sure you are able to receive the work. I will ask you to complete a comprehensive health questionnaire so that I can gauge where I need to be extra cautious or adapt the process. We can also take photographs at the beginning of this session. This can be a useful tool to allow us to see geographical changes that may happen during the course of the treatments but as structural integration is about so much more than just getting aesthetic change it is not completely necessary. People often take time to adapt into their new space – maybe some time after the end of the series and so in a way having photographs at the beginning and end of the session would be interesting, but what would be more relevant would be to also have photographs done 6 months after the series. We also take time on the first session to find out what you would like to achieve from the series. For some it can be as simple as just feeling better within themselves, for others (often for those that have had structural integration before) it may be to achieve an even deeper level of awareness and transformation.

At the beginning of each session I will look in some detail at your structure. For this you will be required to stand in front of me or at the side of me whilst we look in a mirror. Using a mirror allows a more collaborative approach to seeing where you could benefit from more lift or space. If you can see it too, it starts a process of education, new understanding and self-awareness, which is one of the fundamental parts of this process. For the assessment I will need to see you from all sides, often what a person projects to the world from the front is a different story to what they hold in the back or sides, so it is important for me to see you from all sides.

What to wear?

For the photographs and assessment and for the rest of the treatment you will be required to wear underwear only (if you

prefer, draping will be used over areas not being treated). For ladies the best type of top is a wireless bra that does not cross over at the back and a pair of full knickers or a pair of loose shorts and knickers, for gentlemen just a pair of underpants, either ones with brief legs or no legs (jocks) or loose shorts and underpants but not boxer shorts. Think of these articles of clothing as your S.I. uniform and either bring them with you to the session or wear them to the session. Wearing these will make the treatment easier to do because throughout the treatment you are required to move your limbs or other areas of your body through varying ranges and degrees of movement, as well as be asked to walk around from time to time to bring awareness to and integrate any changes.

Session One

Addresses the tissues of the superficial front line, which runs from the top of the foot, up the legs, over the abdomen and sternum to the neck and around the back of the head. This session aims to introduce you to the work, allows me to assess how you respond to my touch and where your tolerance for deep touch is. In this session we have an intention of opening the breath from the front of the body.

At the end of each session we finish with work to the back, neck and sacrum (not necessarily in that order) to make sure you are heading out of the clinic in an integrated and settled way.

Session Two

Before we begin I would like to know if you have noticed anything different and if you have any questions. I will assess your structure before starting the work on the table. This session focuses on the superficial back line which runs from the plantar surface of the foot, up the back of the legs, over the sacrum, the superficial muscles of the back and neck, up to and over the occiput to the frontal bone of the head. The aim of this session is to give grounding through the legs and feet, allow the head to rest on the spine and shoulders with more balance. In this session I will begin to deepen my touch and open the tissues that soldier on, day in day out to hold us in an upright position.

Session Three

By now we are getting into our groove! You know the drill and we both start to relax a little. You may have some new insights or awareness or you may not, don't worry if you don't have anything to report, everyone has a different way of assimilating this work. We have ten more sessions to go and a lot more territory to cover with many more opportunities to explore new things.

This sessions territory are both sides of the body, from underneath to the outside of the foot, up the side of the legs, the sides of the trunk, and on to the sides of the neck. The aim of this session is to start giving 3 dimensional space to the body by 'opening the wings' and encouraging full breath into the sides, opening the ribs and increasing volume. We also want to start getting sense of balance through the sides of legs from the pelvis, easing tissues that are held or fixed by dominant 'X' or 'O' leg patterns, or side tilts of the pelvis.

Session Four

We are now on the last of our sleeve sessions and the territory is anything that is covered by what we term the spiral line. This is a little bit of the areas that we have covered in each of the three sessions previous. As a line of tension it runs from the tissues underneath the foot, up the front and side of the lower leg, up the back and side of the thigh, across the sacral area, up the back to the neck and then it loops round the back of the head to come back down the neck and upper back, under the scapulas, around the sides on the middle to lower ribs from one side and across the abdomen to the pelvis or hip on the other side. The aim of this session is to ease superficial rotations, address any imbalance between the angles of each scapula, achieve balance between the foot arch, knees and pelvis and start preparing the body for the core sessions.

Session Five

The beginning of the core sessions. This may be a good opportunity to take more photographs but not a necessity. We have managed to ease out some of the more superficial patterns that the body has ingeniously presented to the world

in order to cope with the deeper patterns within the core. Because of this 'undoing' you may appear to have a less sensible looking pattern or structure at this stage but hopefully not too much! In the first of the core sessions we work on the lower deep front line which covers the areas of the body on top of the foot but we are accessing structures that are deeper than those during work on the superficial front line. The territory then covers tissue deep within the lower leg and what may seem contradictory for the name of the line because we are working on areas that feel to be in the back of the lower leg, but are actually the core of the body. With this in mind we then move to tissues on the inside of the thigh and onto areas where the tissues attach onto the lower part of the pelvis; the sits bones (ischial tuberosities) and pubic ramus. I find it useful to refer to diagrams and George, the skeleton during this session so that you have an idea of the structures that I will be releasing and where you will be feeling change. In this session we want to build support and lift through the inner leg and give permission for the core tissues to release and if your system is ready, for them to stop having to protect and hold you in unnecessary tension. A third goal of this session is to give support from below for the organs within the deep pelvis (rectum, prostate, uterus, and bladder). The posterior intermuscular septum of the adductors, (the muscles on the inside of the leg), that attach onto the lower pelvis and pelvic floor support the organs of the deep pelvis. By achieving better balance in the adductors and by bringing new movement awareness to the area, these organs are indirectly affected and supported.

Session Six

The central deep front line; continuing on with the work to the core, this session works on myofascial tissues around the ventral cavity. As such, the territory extends from the groin in the front of the hip joint to the clavicle and the base of the neck. One of the goals here is to release the deeper breath by working with the diaphragm. We also want to free, open and give support to the myofascial tissues within the abdominal balloon.

Session Seven

This session works on the back of the deep front line or you could think of it as the deep back line. We cover some previous territory here with the plantar tissues of the feet, the back of the legs and the muscles in the back but on this second time round we are able to sink deeper into the layers to achieve release of longer held patterns. We also bring a major focus of this session to the muscles around the pelvis, hips and sacrum, as well as unwinding the deeper bends and rotations within the muscles close to the spine.

Session Eight

This is the last of the core sessions. The aim of this session is to have the head more balanced on top of the spine, neck and shoulders and to give ease and release to the bones of the skull, face and jaw. Working within my scope of practice as an S.I. practitioner I will help achieve this balance with gentle finger placement onto areas in the mouth and nasal passages. As with any part of the body there are areas that are best avoided or extra caution needed due to health history. With the intra-oral and intra-nasal work I will recap on your health history and ask you to be particularly mindful of any history of oral surgery, if you have bridges or dentures please let me know. If you have had nasal or sinus surgery, chronic and uncontrolled sinusitis or a history of nosebleeds this work may be contra-indicated so it is important that you let me know at the beginning of this session.

Sessions Nine, Ten, Eleven & Twelve

These are the integration sessions. These sessions allow us to review and recap on previous work rather than starting with new challenges. This is the time that we can look at the initial goals and assess if these are being achieved and what we can do to enhance your awareness into achieving these goals.

In session nine we integrate the lower girdle by balancing the lower body around its new core, enhancing 3-dimensional movement in the pelvis and balancing the alignment of the legs in walking.

In session ten we integrate the torso and breathing goals. The upper body now has its new core to dress itself around and this is an opportunity to build integration within the structures of

this area, allowing the whole body to be affected by the breath. Breath is our most fundamental life support and having balanced breath will have the best health effect on the ventral organs and energy levels.

Session eleven enhances your connection to the world by working with the shoulders and arms.

Session twelve.... what a journey we have been on. You have a new pattern in your core. Your superficial coat can now be draped more comfortably over your more balanced core and over your skeleton and hopefully you are now moving with more ease and poise. You have been given a new awareness and strategies for noticing and easing out of unhelpful patterns. You have taken back the ownership of your own good health. In this session we will concentrate on bringing coordination, unity of intent and being open to new possibilities both within the way your body functions internally as well as the way you may interact with the world externally. By balancing the tissues around the major joints and putting the finishing touches to all the lines we complete the series and give you the opportunity to go out and continue exploring how this best fits you.

Everyone needs different amounts of time to engage with their new space. Hopefully now you have the energy, motivation to curiosity to explore other ways to continue your journey with Feldenkrais awareness through movement classes, yoga practice, walking amongst the trees, kayaking on the lakes or any number of ways in which you can enjoy being the best version of you and if you are one of the lucky ones that already have the capabilities to engage in these activities, perhaps you will see the trees in a different light, see the light on the lake more vividly or have an enhanced awareness of all the things that bring out the best in you.

And with this I bid you adieu and wish you all the best on your continued journey.