

Therapy Balls and Rolwing®

by Marsha Presnell-Jennette

*Jonathan Jo has a mouth like an O
And a wheelbarrow full of surprises;
If you ask for a bat,
or something like that,
He has got it,
Whatever the size is.*

A.A. Milne

Introducing therapy balls into my Rolwing sessions has proved to be somewhat like Jonathan Jo's wheelbarrow full of surprises. They provide unexpected solutions to a wide range of the structural challenges we see in our offices. I was pleased to learn following my presentation at last year's Annual Meeting that many Rolfers already have a large ball in their offices. However, many people said that they didn't know how to incorporate balls into their sessions.

I have been working with a variety of balls for a few years, and have found them useful for enhancing my creativity, personal self-maintenance and providing support for clients. This article will give you some of my ideas, and I hope will encourage your own creativity.

ENHANCING CREATIVITY AND PERSONAL MAINTENANCE

Incorporating the therapy balls into my sessions has enhanced my sense of possibilities and stretches my creativity by taking me away from the confined space of my Rolwing table. Therefore, my sessions have become more specific and individually adaptive to each client. For example, when doing sitting back work upon a bench a client has few movement options. However, if the client sits on a ball while I'm doing back work he can pay attention to the sensations and movement options while observing the connection through the legs into his back.

My creativity is enhanced by using the balls myself, for exploration and personal maintenance. I use small balls as well as a large ball for various stretches and moves against a wall. For instance, small, soft balls held between my hands and a wall (or between my back and wall) help me stretch and explore movement through my arms into my shoulder girdle and the connection all the way through my body down to my feet. Because I like to dance I use a variety of music to keep me on a roll!

Using balls gives me more "hands" in a Rolwing session and it gives me "hands" in my own movement practice. I use softly inflated small balls tucked into the axillary space of

each arm, and send breath through my ribs echoing into the balls; I can then begin to remember another option for breathing. Moving my shoulder girdle while breathing full, round breaths, I feel my shoulders ease and an unwinding of an overworked Rolfer's body begins! I often teach this movement to clients, with the addition of my hands working facial restrictions. I find it very effective for releasing shoulder girdles. The more time you spend using these orbs for your joy of movement exploration, the more innovative you will become in incorporating these tools into your practice.

SUPPORT, SAFETY AND TRUST

I am careful about how I introduce the use of the balls with clients. It is important to remember that people can only find release and openness within a context of support and safety. In the beginning of a basic 10 series, when I want to establish the client's sense of safety and trust, I use softly inflated balls as supportive props that do not require a client to "manage" the ball or engage actively with the ball. The client can be passive and supported by the ball. This allows greater relaxation while providing some assistance in opening the areas being addressed. The principle of support guides my decisions of when and how to

increase the role of a ball in the session with a client. For example, I do not require a client to sit on a ball until I am confident the client can maintain balance on the ball while being engaged in the sensory stimulation of my hands-on work.

The support of balls encourages movement and is responsive to movement; it is a support inviting exploration and allowing greater release. I've discovered this support provides more information to my hands and with some guidance from me can help clients gain greater awareness of their bodies. The reverberation through the ball helps me track both restrictions and the easy flow of movement through elastic tissue. The ball's resilient support is a reminder of our natural fluidity and watery beginnings.

Some clients are "spherically challenged"; they may feel self-conscious or vulnerable when asked to use the ball in some way. Respect this uneasiness and provide some stability for the ball. A circular stabilizer for balls or small buckwheat pillows or rolled towels keep the balls secure. Acknowledging these concerns and providing appropriate security while encouraging the client to use the ball can be a very therapeutic experience. My ease in using the ball for myself as I work (they make great rolling stools!) also models for the client an ability to trust the ball to provide support.

A client also can't trust a ball that is too small or underinflated for the intended purpose, as it won't provide support. However, a softly inflated ball is very useful in many situations. It can provide a gentle stability and adapt to the weight of the client's body. For example, the medium or large soft ball can cradle the back of the legs when the client is supine. When a client is lying on his side the

underinflated egg is helpful under the medial side of the femur while the legs are bent, encouraging movement of the femur into the hip. When the client is lying face down I like to use the soft egg shape between the sternum and the pubic bone, supporting the length of the torso (adding pillows if needed) to gently extend the spine.

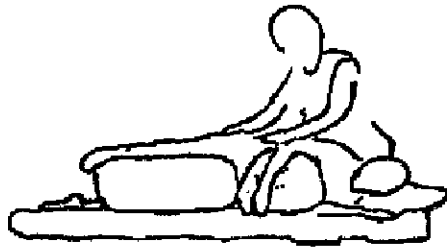
It is my theory that incorporating these soft, supportive balls into our structural integration sessions introduces an element of being cradled and accepted without judgment. The Rolfer is not cradling the client; the Rolfer is educating and eliciting new movement options. With the client's participation, the ball symbolically becomes the "Great Mother," that archetypal ideal comforting figure. The client moves and is supported in their movement. This seems to me to be addressing the emotional, spiritual essence of the person somatically, which is part of our third paradigm model and something we value in our work and embody within ourselves.

TIPS FOR USING BALLS

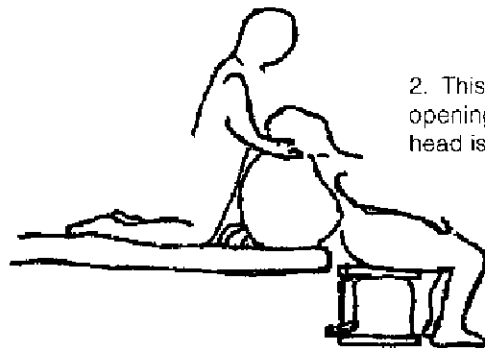
- ▶ I use an assortment of balls. The sizes range from about 7 inches to a 29-inch orb shape. I use two sizes of egg shaped balls, an 18-inch is usually underinflated and a 24 inch egg fully inflated. Some of the balls are soft-textured balls and others are slick vinyl.
- ▶ Match the ball size to the client. If the ball is too large it can be a chore to manage for practitioner and client, lessening its usefulness as a comfortable support.
- ▶ Do not use a slick ball on slick floors! The ribbed balls are for hardwood floors or other uncarpeted floors.
- ▶ A towel, a pillowcase, or a folded

sheet provides creature comfort for clients, as balls can feel cold next to bare skin.

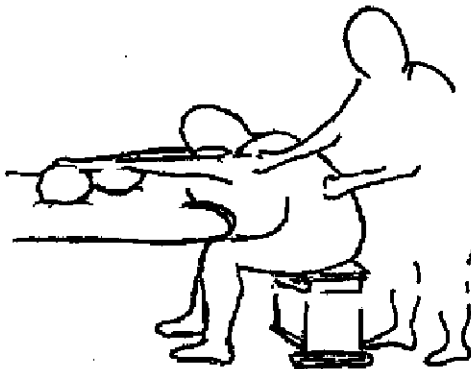
- ▶ To lengthen the life of your ball, keep it away from heat sources, extreme temperatures (hot or cold), and sharp objects.
- ▶ Make sure the ball doesn't hyper-extend the client's neck. For instance, if the client's back is supported by a large ball for chest opening work, the head needs to be appropriately supported. This would vary with the relationship of the size of the client to the ball.
- ▶ Make sure you don't cut off the client's breathing space when using a softly inflated ball for supporting the front of the body.



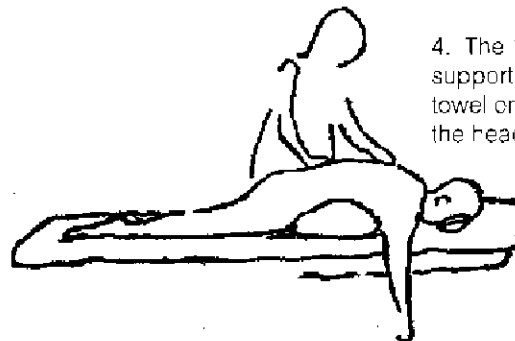
1. Upper leg supported by an 18" egg shaped ball that is under inflated. A 15" soft ball supports the arm.



2. This position is effective for chest opening work. Make sure the client's head is supported and the ball is secure.



3. An under inflated 18" egg or an under inflated soft vinyl ball supports the front of the body. Small 7" balls are under the hands.



4. The 18" egg—under inflated— supports the front of the body. A folded towel or small buckwheat pillow supports the head allowing breathing space.