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CranioSacral Therapy

Celebrate the Healing Power of a Gentle Touch

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Sometimes all the body needs to activate the healing process is a light touch by a skilled hand. CranioSacral Therapy is a gentle approach that works to alleviate a range of sensory, motor or neurological disorders.

It's no secret that among the keys to good health are proper nutrition, exercise, a stress-free life (to the extent that's possible) and steering clear of harmful habits. But what about that aspect of health that originates from inside, within our internal self-healing system? We know that the body is designed to defend us from disease and assist in healing, as evidenced every time we "fight off" a cold or a cut heals. What we may not be aware of are the innovative hands-on techniques available to facilitate that process.

CranioSacral Therapy (CST) is a light-touch manual approach that enhances the body's natural healing capabilities. For nearly 30 years it has been shown to be effective for a wide range of medical problems associated with pain and loss of function. CST is useful as both a primary treatment method and combined with other traditional or complementary techniques.

How CST Works

The CranioSacral Therapy practitioner works with the patient to assist the body's self-correcting mechanisms. Generally using about five grams of pressure, or about the weight of a nickel, the practitioner evaluates the body's craniosacral system. This system plays a vital role of maintaining the environment in which the central nervous system functions. It consists of the membranes and fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord as well as the attached bones – including the skull, face and mouth, which make up the cranium, and the tailbone area, or sacrum. Since the brain and spinal cord are contained within the central nervous system, it is easy to see that the craniosacral system has powerful influence over a wide variety of bodily functions.

The CranioSacral Therapy practitioner essentially helps the body release restrictions – which it has been unable to overcome on its own – that inhibit the body's normal, self-correcting tendencies. Rather than deciding how these changes should be made, the therapist follows cues from the body on how to proceed. When the therapist follows this gentle approach, the method is extremely safe and effective. The few contraindications to CST are aneurysm, intracranial hemorrhage, and other conditions where altering intracranial fluid is not recommended.

Benefits of CranioSacral Therapy

CST has been shown to alleviate a wide range of conditions, including traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries,

migraine headaches, chronic fatigue, motor-coordination impairments, chronic neck and back pain, [scoliosis](#), central nervous system disorders, temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMJ), stress and tension-related problems, and orthopedic problems. While the focus of CST is to uncover the source of the problem, symptom relief also is achieved. The length of time and number of sessions needed is extremely variable and depends, among other factors, on the complex layers of injury and trauma that may mask the original cause of the problem as well as the body's defense mechanisms. Due to its gentleness and effectiveness, many people include CST as a component in their personal wellness programs. They report having more energy, sleeping better and being sick less often.

The Foundations of CranioSacral Therapy

In the early part of this century, osteopathic physician William Sutherland put forth the original concepts for what is now known as the craniosacral system. Dr. Sutherland's studies culminated in a system of treatment known as Cranial Osteopathy. Another osteopath, John Upledger, is credited with developing CranioSacral Therapy. While assisting during a surgery in 1970, Dr. Upledger observed a rhythmic movement of the dura mater, the membrane that encompasses the brain and spinal cord. Neither his colleagues nor medical texts could explain his observation. Dr. Upledger's curiosity led him to the work of Dr. Sutherland, and later to develop his own scientific studies to confirm the existence of the craniosacral system. This work went on from 1975 to 1983, while he served as a clinical researcher and Professor of Biomechanics at Michigan State University. The findings of the research team he supervised first established the scientific basis for the craniosacral system.

Dr. Upledger's continued work resulted in his development of CST. He formed The Upledger Institute in 1985 to educate the public and healthcare practitioners about the benefits of CST. To date, the Institute has trained more than 40,000 healthcare practitioners worldwide in the use of CST. Practitioners include osteopathic physicians, medical doctors, doctors of [chiropractic](#), doctors of Oriental Medicine, naturopathic physicians, psychiatric specialists, psychologists, dentists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, nurses, acupuncturists, and massage therapists.

With a growing number of practitioners, CST provides a new healthcare option – one that uses a gentle approach working with the body. By following the body's lead, the CST practitioner often can uncover the source of pain or dysfunction that can open the path to wellness.

Further Information

Your Inner Physician and You by John Upledger, D.O. (North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA, and UI Enterprises, Palm Beach Gardens, FL, 1997) describes CranioSacral Therapy in greater detail and offers a number of case histories.

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Peer Review by Leading Specialists

Mark R. McLaughlin, MD



Although traditional medicine cannot explain the exact therapeutic mechanism of craniosacral therapy, I have seen some patients get significant pain relief from this technique. I offer it as an alternative therapy for patients with degenerative disease of the spine who are not surgical candidates or for those who would like to explore all avenues of non-surgical therapy.

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