

What is Craniosacral Therapy? (CST)

by Pat Fasick, O.T.R./L

Craniosacral Therapy (CST) is a branch of osteopathy that was started in the early part of the 20th century. It was further developed in the 1970's by John E. Upledger, an osteopathic physician and surgeon. He developed a light-touch manipulative therapy, "cranio-sacral," that freed restrictions in motion, in the cranium and body. CST is a gentle, non-invasive, hands-on method of intervention that causes no discomfort or disturbance to the client. The practitioner uses soft touch, generally no greater than 5 grams or about the weight of a nickel, and hands-on manual holds to release restrictions in the craniosacral system, to improve the functioning of the central nervous system.

Craniosacral system & treatment

The craniosacral system is comprised of the membranes (meninges) and cerebrospinal fluid that surrounds and protect the brain and spinal cord (central nervous system). It includes the bones of the skull, face and mouth (which make up the cranium), as well as the spinal cord all the way down to the tailbone area (sacrum & coccyx). It also includes the fascia (connective tissue) which typically radiates out from the membranes to all parts of the body. All of these structures pulsate in a symmetrical, balanced and rhythmic motion (the cranial rhythm) in the cranium and the whole body. A trained practitioner can palpate the craniosacral rhythm at any point in the body.

Restrictions, blockages or dysfunction of any kind in cranium or the body are reflected as disturbances of the rhythm and symmetry in the CST system. It is also noted as abnormal pulls and tension within the body tissues. A craniosacral therapist can identify these and trace them to their source.

Treatment is very gentle and follows the subtle internal pulls and twists that manifest out of the craniosacral system. The areas of restriction are followed, held in their place of ease, or unwound, assisting the tissues and bone to return to their original place of alignment and health and the fluid flow to improve.

Craniosacral Therapy & autism

Craniosacral Therapy creates a sense of ease, calmness and well being. It ultimately helps to calm the central nervous system and reduce the inflammation in the membranous tissues that surround the brain and spinal cord. Craniosacral therapy helps the body to achieve inner body balance or homeostasis (the body regulates

its internal environment and maintains a stable constant condition), so daily functioning and learning are eased.

It is theorized that individuals with autism present with a loss of flexibility and probable inflammation of the membrane layers surrounding the brain. This compromise can create a restrictive force on the brain tissue leading to an adverse strain on the internal body-regulating parts of the brain.

The focus of Craniosacral Therapy with individuals with autism is to remove the restrictions and enhance the balanced motion of:

- the membrane layers surrounding the brain;
- the fluid moving in/out of the cranium and throughout the brain tissue and;
- areas of the body with an abnormal craniosacral rhythm or flow.

It is felt that when the brain membranes are balanced, toxins are more easily flushed out and inflammation is reduced in the brain tissue. When this tension and imbalance is relieved, the brain tissue has more typical cerebral fluid flow and motion and as a consequence it naturally elevates biochemical processing which increases the function of neurons and their pathways.

The whole body also benefits from CST work. When the cranium is relieved of its restrictions and tensions, it facilitates ease in the spinal cord. With all of the nervous system connections (nerves, membranes, fluid and fascia), general bodywork can help to relieve discomfort and dysfunction in as well as aid in the correction of the digestive and immune system dysfunction.

Craniosacral treatment & results

Craniosacral bodywork is typically carried out on a weekly basis in 3/4- 1 hour sessions. Treatment continues until the client presents with little or no obvious craniosacral restrictions and there is a noticeable change in function and/or behavior.

Changes reported in clients with autism may include a reduction in: head banging, thumb sucking, toe walking, self-injurious behavior, sensory overload and reactivity, tantrums or emotional upsets. Also noted is a reduction in hyperactivity and anxious behavior, better sleep, more overall calmness and better eye contact. Improvements in fine motor and especially gross motor skills and coordination and balance are often reported. More long-term changes include better speech and socialization and improvements in general health (less infections and colds).



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Pat Fasick holds a B.S. in Occupational Therapy from The Ohio State University School of Allied Medicine. She has practiced Occupational Therapy for over 25 years with a primary emphasis in pediatrics and years of experience in adults and geriatrics. She is certified in Neurodevelopmental Treatment, The Therapeutic Listening Program and Interactive Metronome. Pat also has extensive training in Sensory Integration and Sensory Processing treatment. In the last 10 years, Pat has focused much of her treatment intervention on eating and feeding concerns of infants and children. She has recently trained in the SOS (Sequential-Oral–Sensory) model and has over 20 years experience with in hospital and outpatient feeding. She is greatly interested in the biomedical model of assessment for infants and children and its effects on eating behaviors and volume intake. She feels strongly that the OT & biomedical practitioner should work closely to coordinate care and treatment for many children.