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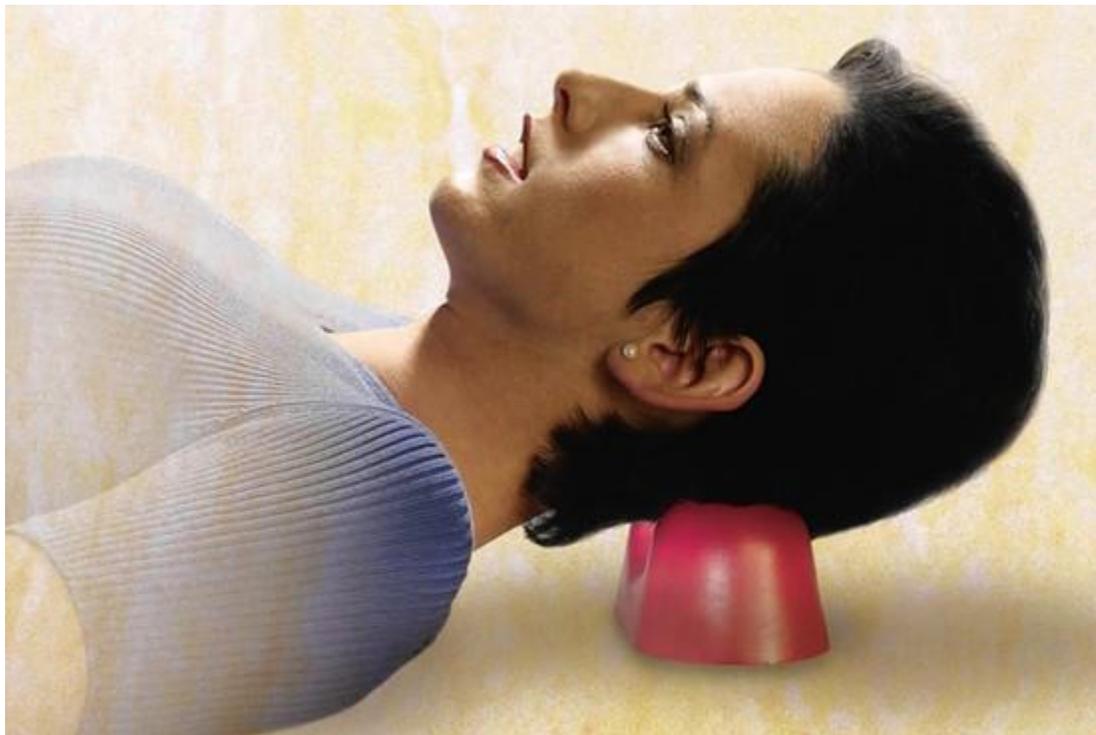
LIFE & CULTURE

To Relax You, Devices Apply Pressure to Points in the Neck

Sometimes Called Still Point Inducers, These Devices Are Designed to Be Used While Lying Down

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The Still Point Inducer from the Upledger Institute International and other similar devices are used to help prevent migraines and improve sleep. *CJ Walker*

The Claim: Devices that apply pressure to certain points in a person's neck can create a deep sense of relaxation, help prevent migraines, aid sleep and ease chronic pain, say companies that sell the

devices. Sometimes called still point inducers, these devices are placed under the head while lying down.

The Verdict: A small study found a device, in combination with soothing music, provided pain relief equivalent to a 10-minute massage. However, scientists say, the devices haven't been studied enough to know if they have positive effects.

The Still Point Inducer, currently \$16 from the Upledger Institute International Inc. of Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., is a piece of foam with two humps. Becalm Balls, \$30 from the Cranial Therapy Centre in Toronto, consists of two soft green balls on a string that can be adjusted for different-sized heads. Both are designed to go under the skull while a person is lying on a bed or floor.

A still point, as described by the companies, is a pause in the “cranial rhythm,” a pulsing that results from the fluid around the brain and spinal cord continuously increasing and decreasing in volume. The still point momentarily stops that rhythm, creating a deep relaxation, companies say.



Becalm Balls from the Cranial Therapy Centre has a string that can be adjusted for each user. *Becalm*

The theory of a cranial rhythm isn't accepted by most doctors and scientists, and still-point devices haven't undergone rigorous testing, scientists say. “The evidence is not out there for these devices,” says Anne Jäkel, head of research at the European School of Osteopathy, Maidstone, U.K. Though, she says she jury-rigged a still-point device using a glass bottle and found it “very relaxing.”

Craniosacral therapy—popularized by the late John E. Upledger, who was an osteopathic physician and founder of the Upledger Institute—includes gentle pressure on the skull, or elsewhere in the

body, aimed at inducing still points. The concept of a home device began with makeshift devices—originally two tennis balls tied together in a sock—intended to stimulate the relaxing pressure used by craniosacral therapists, says John Matthew Upledger, chief executive of the institute and son of the founder.

The Still Point Inducer should be placed 2 or 3 inches above the junction of the skull and neck according to its instructions. The Becalm Balls are positioned directly behind the eyes, says Cranial Therapy Centre co-founder John Harris.

A study of 22 patients suffering from chronic pain found a 10-minute session with the Becalm Balls that included soothing music and a lavender aroma, reduced self-reported pain to 3.5 from 5.4 on a scale of zero to 10. The pain reduction was about equivalent to a control group that got a 10-minute massage by health-care workers with the music and aromatherapy. But the device has the advantage of being simple to use at home, says study co-author Carolyn S. Townsend, assistant professor at Indiana University Kokomo School of Nursing in Kokomo, Ind. The company didn't fund the study but gave Dr. Townsend a discount on the product.

The Still Point Inducer hasn't been tested in clinical trials but Boca Raton, Fla., physical therapist Mariann Sisco, who does training for the Upledger Institute, says her patients find it helpful in preventing migraines and improving sleep. She recommends patients start out using it for only 3 minutes at a time, and gradually increasing to 10 minutes, several times a day

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