



Craniosacral Therapy in the Midwifery Model of Care

by [Kara Maria Ananda](#)
September 1, 2008

Editor's note: This article first appeared in *Midwifery Today*, [Issue 87](#), Autumn 2008.
[Join Midwifery Today Online Membership](#)

Photos provided by the author

How can the gentle touch of craniosacral therapy (CST) prevent and heal birth trauma? This relaxing bodywork is growing in popularity among midwives, doulas and childbirth professionals as a modality complementary to holistic maternity care. Mothers are seeking out craniosacral therapists as well, to assist themselves and their babies in achieving optimal health in the childbearing year.

Craniosacral therapy is a gentle, non-invasive and powerful hands-on therapy that benefits whole body health, treats a multitude of conditions and is effective for infants, children and adults. Though the craniosacral therapist uses a very light touch, the bodywork is deeply transformative and healing—physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.



The soft, hands-on bodywork techniques of the craniosacral therapist are non-invasive and serve to relieve pain and dysfunction in the body. The body's physical release of myofascial restriction facilitates the innate potential for increased wellness and a peaceful consciousness.

The craniosacral system develops shortly after conception, when the first cell divides in the womb and forms the primal midline that becomes our spine. From that moment onward, the health of all our systems is organized around the midline—the spine. Our bones, joints and muscles should be balanced to be healthy, but like a tree that has grown twisted due to the wind, our spines and connective tissues can be affected by tension, trauma and injury throughout life—beginning with the prenatal and birth experiences.

Craniosacral therapy is a gentle way to relieve restrictions in the body to increase the capacity of the individual's nervous system for health, harmony and well-being. The body naturally seeks homeostasis—and craniosacral therapy facilitates this balancing. When an individual experiences restriction or trauma, whether through a challenging birth or an injury or emotional shock to the nervous system, the body alters its priority from actualization to survival mode. The sooner that trauma, shock and restriction are released from the body, the easier and faster the healing process.

Craniosacral therapy is wonderful for all ages and conditions—from those with severe conditions to those looking for preventive health care. In an ideal world, all pregnant women and infants would receive craniosacral therapy to promote healthy births, babies and families, thus saving on health care costs in the long run!

What Is Craniosacral Therapy?

The craniosacral system (CSS) consists of the brain and spinal cord, the three membranes that completely surround it, the craniosacral fluid within the membranes and the fascial connections to the bones of the cranium, cervical vertebrae and sacrum. The dura mater is the tough outer membrane that connects to the cranium and sacrum and contains the entire fluid craniosacral system. The CSS has a slow, gentle rhythm that resonates throughout the entire body.



Through gentle soft tissue release, the practitioner works with the craniosacral rhythm to release tension in the fascia and balance the ligaments, muscles and bones. The craniosacral rhythm can be felt as a result of subtle palpation through contact with the cranium, spine, and sacrum—as well as throughout the entire body. If there is not movement or expression of the craniosacral rhythm and tide throughout the body's tissues, then restriction, dysfunction and pain settle into the body.

The craniosacral therapist assesses the body for restrictions and uses a very light touch to encourage expansion, mobility and healing. Craniosacral therapy effectively creates deep change through gentle touch by addressing issues at the core of the body's health. During craniosacral therapy the practitioner uses no more pressure than 5 gm (the amount needed to hold a nickel) to assess, resolve and prevent restrictions in the body. The treatment is deeply relaxing and recipients often experience a sense of timelessness or “stillpoint.”

Unique from other systems of the body, the CSS actually slows down and enters into stillpoints. These rests are a therapeutic time of revitalization for the CSS—similar to rebooting a computer. After facilitating a craniosacral stillpoint, the individual's CSS functions more strongly and is better coordinated; the body is using its own innate ability to heal.

Regular craniosacral therapy sessions can help to maintain health, well-being and immunity, as well as to ward off depression, musculoskeletal dysfunction and stress. Craniosacral therapy is recommended for pregnant and postpartum women and new babies—as well as for women of all ages and in all stages of life.

Craniosacral Therapy for Pregnancy and Postpartum

Craniosacral therapy assists the pregnant woman along her journey into mothering by releasing restrictions in the body and pelvis to co-create an optimal birthing experience. During pregnancy, one of the primary focuses is to release restrictions in the pelvis to resolve back and hip pain and tension and to prepare for an optimal labor and birth, including promoting optimal fetal positioning. Craniosacral bodywork assists the baby in the womb to have optimal labor, birth and bonding.

Craniosacral supports the pregnant women's inner resources for health, facilitating global balance in the body, heart and spirit. Through light touch, a therapist can balance

the pelvis and uterus in pregnancy to ease and prevent ligament pain, posterior babies and low back, hip or rib pain. During labor and birth, women have obtained profound benefit from midwives and doulas trained in craniosacral therapy who are able to support them with comfort measures to balance and unwind the pelvis, uterus and sacrum.

During the postpartum period, craniosacral therapy restores musculoskeletal reintegration, emotional balance and pelvic health and helps alleviate the discomforts of newborn care and mothering. Craniosacral therapy is even more effective for infants when the mother is simultaneously treated. The mother can be treated while holding the baby or while the baby lies on the mother's belly; the baby also receives treatment this way.

Craniosacral Therapy for Infants

Craniosacral therapy is a wonderful and gentle bodywork modality for infants, babies and children. It promotes health, as well as minimizing or eliminating the effects of birth trauma. Craniosacral therapy is performed with the baby or child wearing comfortable clothing, while the practitioner uses light touch that is soothing and relaxing. Babies enjoy craniosacral therapy. Sessions for babies are usually 15 –45 minutes long and can even be performed with the baby in the parent's arms.

Newborns benefit profoundly from craniosacral therapy because of the intense pressures on the cranium and body during the short, but dramatic passage from the womb to first breath. Craniosacral bodywork for infants in the early postpartum period can prevent numerous breastfeeding challenges by enhancing their tongue thrust, sucking reflex and latch. Babies born by cesarean or instrument delivery are especially in need of craniosacral therapy to ease the unnatural forces that their bodies experienced in birth.

This natural relief from tension is easily done through the craniosacral practitioner's loving touch. Craniosacral therapy gently facilitates the release of restrictions in the myofascial tissues surrounding the tongue, facial bones, cranial bones, cranial nerves, sacrum and more, thus encouraging the increase in vitality and coherence of the craniosacral rhythm.

To the observer, the therapist may appear to be "doing nothing" during a craniosacral session, because he or she is just gently contacting various parts of the body with a light touch. However, this conscious touch is specifically palpating the inherent breath of life within the body and its resonance throughout the fluid dynamics, tissues and bones. This conscious relationship with the recipient's inner healer allows a profound release of tension that occurs as a result of the light touch.

This bodywork assists babies in releasing restrictive patterns in the body before they become issues later in life, thus preventing future disease and dysfunction. Craniosacral therapy is extremely valuable for a baby who experienced a challenging labor and birth or is experiencing health issues. A spectrum of breastfeeding challenges can be treated with craniosacral bodywork including poor latch, reflux, colic, unwillingness to nurse or even painful nipples in mom.

Further reasons to treat a child include: middle ear infections, headaches, learning disabilities, trauma, autism, ADHD, difficult mobility, developmental delays, behavioral

changes, cerebral palsy, chronic pain, genetic disorders, neurological conditions, torticollis, hearing problems, disease prevention, promotion of well-being and more.

Paths for Midwives to Learn Craniosacral Therapy



Craniosacral therapy has roots in cranial osteopathy, yet it has developed into a unique therapy that has many different schools, philosophies and practitioners. Many health care practitioners practice craniosacral therapy in their work, including midwives, naturopathic physicians, acupuncturists, massage therapists, chiropractors, osteopaths, allopathic physicians and dentists.

Numerous resources are available to midwives for further research and study of craniosacral therapy. Carol Gray in Portland, Oregon, is a homebirth midwife, childbirth educator and craniosacral therapist who teaches workshops in Craniosacral Therapy for Pregnancy, Birth, and Postpartum and Craniosacral Therapy for Infants (www.carolgray.com). Carol Phillips, DC, is a chiropractor, doula, and craniosacral therapist who teaches Dynamic Body Balancing: Craniosacral & Myofascial Unwinding, specializing in pregnancy and infant craniosacral (www.newdawnpublish.com).

The Upledger Institute is a craniosacral school founded by Dr. John Upledger, who was responsible for beginning to educate people beyond the osteopathic and chiropractic professional community in craniosacral therapy and for conducting extensive research into the validity and efficacy of craniosacral therapy. His teachings brought craniosacral therapy to the varied health professions so now dentists, midwives and massage therapists all can learn these gentle techniques. The Upledger Institute teaches ShareCare classes to anyone who wants to practice gentle craniosacral techniques on their family. The ShareCare class is especially beneficial for parents of children with special needs (www.upledger.com).

Biodynamic craniosacral therapy is a branch of the modality that deepens the practice of craniosacral therapy to include the understanding of embryology, pre- and perinatal psychology and the deeper tides of the craniosacral rhythm. The craniosacral tides are perceived as an expression of the primal “breath of life”—the inspiration of spirit spiraling into the most sacred of fluids within the brain and moving in coherence with the heart.

Ray Castellino, co-founder of the BEBA Institute and featured in the documentary *What Babies Want*, is a biodynamic craniosacral therapist and teacher. Completion of foundational training in biodynamic craniosacral therapy is a prerequisite for attending

the Castellino Prenatal & Birth Therapy Training and a list of recommended trainers can be found on his Web site (www.castellinotraining.com).

Healing with the Inner Midwife

A light touch is all that is needed to access one's inner healing potential. Dr. Upledger speaks of "the inner physician"—the natural force for homeostasis that is accessed within the core through craniosacral therapy. I believe that a more appropriate term would be "the inner midwife." Truly, the hands-on therapy of craniosacral allows the recipient to midwife his or her own healing on a deep, primal level through enhancing the inner drive for balance. Craniosacral therapy brings to light the innate design for health that is within each woman and child and offers midwives a profound tool for natural healing in the childbearing year.

About Author: Kara Maria Ananda



Kara Maria Ananda is a Healing Arts Educator, Conscious Living Mentor, Holistic Business Coach, Social Media Consultant, Speaker and Writer. She is the author of *How to Have an Awesome Birth* and the creator of the Awesome Birth Teacher Training, Women's Healing Arts Teacher Training, The Breast Essentials, Healing Arts Business Academy and CONNECT: The Social Media Course. She has extensive experience as a wellness entrepreneur in bodywork, women's health, birth, education and coaching. Currently she shares her passion for holistic living arts, creates global online educational programs and is a business coach for wellness entrepreneurs. She can be reached at: <https://wellnessblessing.com/>

<https://midwiferytoday.com/mt-articles/craniosacral-therapy/>