

How Yoga Can Give You The Benefits of Craniosacral Therapy

Craniosacral therapy has similar benefits to yoga and can help release habitual tension in the body.

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UPDATED:

APR 12, 2017

ORIGINAL:

AUG 28, 2007

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Hunched shoulders, an achy back, and a [stiff neck](#) are all signs of a body that could benefit from the soothing hands of a craniosacral therapist—even if you do yoga. In fact, practicing yoga can give you a head start on the benefits of craniosacral therapy (CST). "Yoga helps us do the preliminary work so we're not starting at square one," explains Yolanda Marie Vazquez, a bodyworker and yoga teacher in Oakland, California, who leads workshops on craniosacral therapy and yoga.

These two complement each other in several ways, since CST is likely to have similar benefits to yoga: calming the central nervous system, boosting the immune system, and releasing the body's habitual tension patterns. But unlike yoga, CST is hands-on work that focuses on the area between the skull and the sacrum (the triangular-shaped bone that fits into the back of the pelvis). "Craniosacral therapy is powerful, because it enhances the movement of spinal fluid, which in turn improves the nutrition of the central nervous system—the brain and spinal cord—which rules most of what is going on in the body," says John Upledger, the osteopathic physician who developed craniosacral therapy and founded the [Upledger Institute](#) in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

See *also* [Ease Lower Back + Shoulder Tension with Fascial Work](#)

The underlying concept of CST is that tension can develop in the body's connective tissue (fascia), restricting craniosacral fluid. Craniosacral therapists try to release this tightness by placing very light pressure on an area or by putting their hands on the spot until the muscles slowly release.

A regular [yoga practice](#) can help you reap the benefits of CST more easily by teaching you how to relax and direct your breath—both of which facilitate cranium changes, says Vazquez, who recommends postures that help release the bands of fascia, or "diaphragms" in CST terminology. "It's not about the

specific pose," she says. "It's about awareness and how the breath is directed."

See also [The Stress-Busting Yoga Sequence to Conquer Tension](#)

Begin Craniosacral Therapy with Breathing

Begin your pre-CST yoga practice by focusing on the lateral bands of fascia between the groin and navel (pelvic diaphragm), between the navel and heart (respiratory diaphragm), between the heart and throat (thoracic diaphragm), and at the base of the skull (occipital diaphragm). The most important part of this work is your intention, Upledger says. Once your mind is focused on releasing energy, lie on your back with your arms stretched overhead; breathe into each of the diaphragms and release tightness with each exhalation.

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Asanas For Craniosacral Therapy

After using the breath to release energy, you're ready to use [asanas](#) to enhance it. Open the pelvic diaphragm in [Adho Mukha Svanasana](#) (Downward-Facing Dog Pose) by bending your knees and directing your breath to the area between your groin and navel. Liberate the respiratory diaphragm by lying on your back and bringing one knee to your chest and crossing it over, coming into a twist, and sending your breath between your navel and heart. To release restrictions in the thoracic diaphragm, do supported [backbends](#) or [chest-opening](#) postures. As you breathe, check for restrictions in the area around the fascial band and work to release them. To open all the diaphragms, move slowly through the following poses, imagining the bands releasing with each breath: [Cat-](#)

[Cow](#) Pose, [Balasana](#) (Child's Pose), and [Uttanasana](#) (Standing Forward Bend).

About Our Pro

Nora Isaacs is a freelance writer and the author of [Women in Overdrive: Find Balance and Overcome Burnout at Any Age.](#)

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