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DOES CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY CONTRIBUTE TO A BETTER BIRTH?

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Childbirth is the miraculous experience of creating and bringing forth new life.

Labors and deliveries as individual events are as unique as the children they bring forth. With modern medicine's attempt to create safer healthier birth outcomes, birth has become a more clinical and technical business, one seemingly requiring more invasive procedures.

Mothers-to-be have forgotten how miraculous their bodies are. Complementing traditional methods of prenatal care with the appropriate use of [CranioSacral Therapy](#) (CST) may preclude the need for other more invasive techniques. CranioSacral Therapy may also ease the recovery from necessary invasive procedures.

As with many integrative therapies, research is occurring but there isn't a substantial body of research on CST yet. One study germane to this article is ["Effects of craniosacral therapy as adjunct to standard treatment for pelvic girdle pain in pregnant women: a multicenter, single blind, randomized controlled trial,"](#) published in *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica* in 2013.

In that research, the investigators concluded, "Lower morning pain intensity and less deteriorated function was seen after craniosacral therapy in conjunction with standard treatment compared with standard treatment alone, but no effects regarding evening pain and sick-leave" and that "further studies are warranted before recommending craniosacral therapy for PGP."

Ideally, the birth will be remembered as a wonderful experience and the labor a labor of love. I introduced CST in a hospital at Naval Hospital Lemoore to expecting parents in the prenatal setting, and on the labor and delivery unit. “Our patients who had CST during their labor loved their birth experience,” said Sandra DeGroot, RN, CNM, CAPT, Nurse Corps USN, Retired, Former Commanding Officer of Naval Hospital Lemoore.

“The benefits to mothers and infants are numerous,” she added. “In fact, I am now such a strong proponent of CST that I will go on record to say that it is essential for CST to be integrated into mainstream hospital practice.”

Body Intelligence

Understanding a women’s amazing body intelligence, as observed in the miraculous intelligence during gestation, is a good example of why we should follow its lead. This is why CST works so well, it is based on trusting the intelligence and inner wisdom of the body to follow its lead. With the premise that the body wants to correct itself, and that both mother and baby (fetus) know what needs to be undertaken to affect a successful delivery, there are a number of CranioSacral techniques that have been created to facilitate labor and delivery.

These techniques can help to empower a mom to communicate with her baby and to feel more confident and positive. (Massage therapists employed or contracted with hospitals should possess [a liability insurance policy](#) that covers many modalities and protects them in case of client accident or injury.)

Treating mom with CST during pregnancy allows her to be in more optimum condition for an optimal birth experience and more confident. This is true also for the father or other parent. I attended a birth where the father was a jet fighter pilot in the military. Dad had attended a few of mom and baby’s CST sessions during pregnancy. He went from being hands-off, sit-back kind of dad to fully involved in the pregnancy and birth. One of the most positive and powerful things I’ve ever heard in all the hundreds of births I’ve attended, was this dad at every one of mom’s strong contractions leaning into her belly and saying to baby, “Mom’s power-hugging you out ... one more power hug.”

CranioSacral Therapy for Pregnancy

More often than not, we hear of the struggle and difficulty surrounding birth. With the help of CST before and during labor it is possible for baby’s journey and entrance into the world to be a more positive experience. It is important to stay tuned into the baby as well as mom. A mother doesn’t just give birth; birth is an interaction between two human beings, the mother and her baby.

Realizing that baby’s journey is also a tidal wave of sensation, a sensory experience so vast we can barely conceive of it. A vaginal delivery represents baby’s first CST treatment, spinal mobilization, myoneural system treatment and sensory-stimulation session plus more—all to prepare the baby for transition from life in the womb to the outside world.

Helping women feel less fear and more confidence can empower moms-to-be to remember how miraculous their bodies are. “With the use of CranioSacral Therapy, I found I was confident in birth and was able to recover from my delivery within hours as compared to the weeks that it took with my previous two pregnancies,” said client “Cathy.”

Clinical Discoveries

Through the ongoing use of CST during pregnancy and delivery, the following findings have been noted:

- CST has been able to be used instead of Pitocin to both start or augment labor.
- Adequate progress for the active phase of the first stage of labor (4-10 cm dilation) – 1.0 cm per hour – mothers receiving CST have not shown any evidence of prolonged labor.
- Infants born to those mothers who have received epidurals have shown non-negative effects of the epidural.
- While having a baby quickly may imply more efficiency, speed is not necessarily a sought-after goal. Optimizing whatever time it takes is the goal.
- None of the babies born have required resuscitative efforts.
- Common phrases used by mothers after first few weeks include: “good babies, alert, not fussy, at peace with him or her, calm.”
- Mothers report recovering more quickly and that the adjustment to motherhood is not difficult, or not as difficult compared with the birth of their other children.
- Breastfeeding seems to be more easily accomplished and parents seem to be enjoying their children more.
- Employing the techniques we have developed appear to be producing consistent, predictable results.
- Applying CranioSacral Therapy for pregnancy in the first labor and deliver appears to help the mother through subsequent labors and deliveries.
- Involving siblings strengthens bonds between newborns and older children.

CST Postpartum

The biological process is the naturally programmed and instinctive biological process of development and growth throughout pregnancy and birth. If the development is interrupted by events before it goes to its natural conclusion, dysfunctions can occur. While the story of the event or incident that caused the dysfunction cannot be changed, CranioSacral Therapy for pregnancy can change the story held in the cells to rewrite the script.

[Skin-to-skin bonding with mom and dad](#) is important for emotional as well as brain development. CST can be applied directly after birth if appropriate right away; for example, a CST treatment can aid in the latch for breastfeeding. It is important that the CST practitioner does not get in the way of the mother and child connection. Baby can be treated right on mom.

All of the changes that mom goes through during her pregnancy can cause changes in her posture that can create issues postpartum. One of the most commonly seen by the CST practitioner is what CST developer John E. Upledger, DO, OMM, referred to as the triad of compression/depression. Upledger noticed a correlation between idiopathic endogenous depression (internal depression of unknown origin) and three areas of compression held on the same clients. They are the sphenobasilar junction, the occipital cranial base and L5-S1.

Everyone who had idiopathic endogenous depression had compression in these three areas. These three areas are commonly compressed in postpartum moms because of the postural changes and stress on her body. It is very common, in my experience, that new moms who have postpartum depression or the baby blues are really suffering from this triad effect. It is easily correctable by a properly trained CST practitioner.

The craniosacral system surrounds the central nervous system (CNS), so it is very effective at helping depression also by calming the CNS and encouraging parasympathetic response. Some of the improvements

you see with the application of CST to postpartum depression include: less fatigue, improved energy, decreased stress, [decreased inflammation and pain](#) and increased confidence. When mom feels better, baby feels it. When Mom is less stressed and more confident, this aids in nursing.

Because of the increased intervention at many deliveries, there are now studies being conducted about postpartum post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Kathleen Kendall-Tackett PhD, IBCLC, FAPA says that childbirth can cause PTSD. Birth was or is perceived as being life-threatening, or as having caused or potentially caused harm to the mom or her baby. [CST is very effective for facilitating the release of the trauma](#) from the tissues of the body for both mother and child.

I was at a hospital during a traumatic cesarean and was asked to treat the newborn immediately after birth as baby was in stress. By treating the baby with CST right away, baby released the trauma and relaxed and all of baby's vitals were improved. It was alarming to see so much trauma in a newborn. I can't help but wonder how the baby would be if the trauma had not been released right away. We've treated many adults that have carried trauma from their birth their whole lives, which has been the root of a domino effect of many other challenges.

CranioSacral Therapy for pregnancy and postpartum is wonderful for helping mom's body get back into better balance, physically, mentally and emotionally postpartum, as well as the newborn. The gentleness of CST along with the respect of the client's inner wisdom and guidance allows the new mom and baby to be treated in the most appropriate way and time for them. This allows them both to feel more content and peaceful. If more babies and moms could feel that deep peace from the beginning of life, it would change our planet.

Thus, the saying, *a peaceful birth creates a more peaceful earth.*

About the Author



Carol McLellan, CMT, CST-D, CD, is a diplomate-certified CST practitioner. She teaches multiple courses for [Upledger Institute International](#). She was invited by John E. Upledger, DO, OMM, to develop the birth curriculum for CST and is also the ombudsman for UII. She has presented "CST for Birth" in many hospitals throughout the world. She has been a childbirth educator and doula for more than 25 years. She wrote "This is How CranioSacral Therapy Contributes to a Conscious Pregnancy" for the April 2018 print issue of *MASSAGE Magazine*.

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