

PROVIDE MORE RELIEF FROM PAIN WITH CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY

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- [John Matthew Upledger](#)



John Matthew Upledger (1960–2017) wrote this article for *MASSAGE Magazine*'s February 2012 issue, and we are republishing it here honor to honor his memory—and to educate massage therapists about the benefits of CranioSacral Therapy, the technique John Matthew's father, John E. Upledger, D.O., created.

[John Matthew passed away on May 21.](#) He had been involved in Upledger Institute International for more than 30 years, in areas including clinical services and education.

Like massage therapy, CranioSacral Therapy is a gentle and effective tool to have in a therapist's set of skills for pain relief. CranioSacral and massage both create more space in the body, increase flexibility and decrease pain.

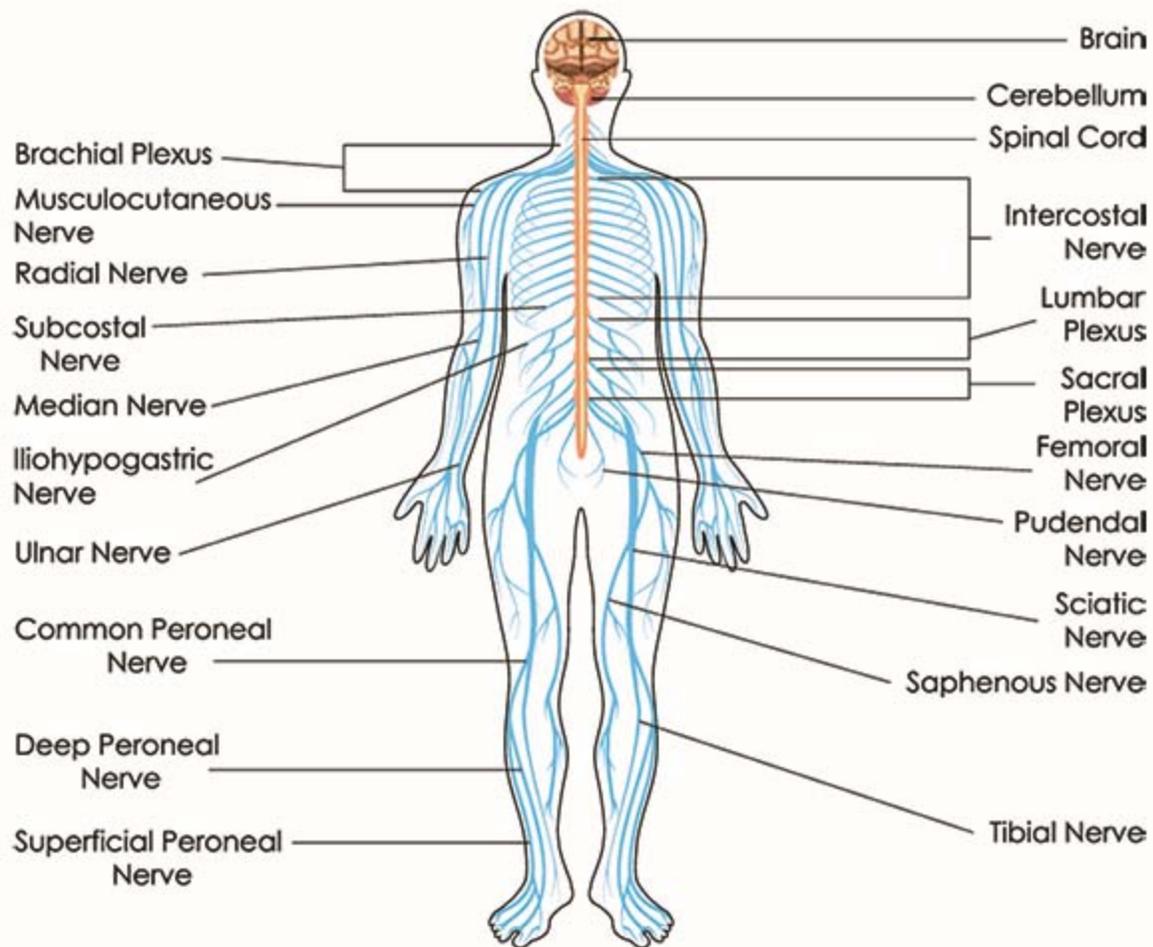
Individually, the two approaches help provide relaxation and pain relief, both of which are necessary in the promotion of internal healing. Applied together, however, massage and CranioSacral Therapy can open up a whole new depth to the healing process and treatment of clients.

One of the wonderful advantages to massage is the flexibility in its application, in the sense that it lends itself to easily be combined with other modalities. In this way, massage routines can be customized to each client's needs.

Similarly, CranioSacral Therapy techniques can be tailored to address a particular complaint and are easily incorporated into other protocols.

With proper training, the light-touch approach enables it to be used safely and effectively on clients of all ages, from newborns to senior citizens—and on those with varying degrees of pain and disability.

CranioSacral Benefits Flexibility



NERVOUS SYSTEM

Have you ever had clients on whose trouble spots you have worked, only to have them come in time and time again with the same complaint? A massage most certainly helps in the short run as well as over time, but it starts to become obvious there may be something else, some other influence on [the area of pain](#) that is not being addressed.

Many times, an aspect of the client's lifestyle is a constant contributor to the problem. If one habitually sits crouched and bent while typing on a keyboard for hours a day, for example, the odds of long-term pain relief are slim without modification of the behavior.

In many cases, this may be enough—but what if something even deeper is occurring, such as a vicious cycle of [repetitive behavior](#), muscle tension, tissue contraction or perhaps even a deeper neural component the body has set up?

This scenario can unfortunately create a mechanism of pain and tension that one modality alone may not be able to fully address.

“We have all experienced this to some degree,” said Judy Blix, a California-based physical therapist, diplomat-certified CranioSacral Therapy practitioner and Upledger CranioSacral Therapy instructor.

She noted a classic case of “Jane,” a 34-year-old medical transcriptionist and full-time, single mom. Caring for two young children as well as sitting and working from her laptop throughout the day, Jane began to develop significant mid-back pain.

After three years of enduring the pain, she finally sought relief and began receiving weekly massages with positive, but limited, results. Her massage therapist consulted with her on her daily habits.

They worked on changing the way she picked up and held her children, as well as making sure she always sat in an upright chair at a table versus bent over on the floor or couch when working on her laptop. These behavior modifications seemed to help, but her mid-back pain still prevailed.

Having taken the first level class in CranioSacral Therapy, Jane’s massage therapist decided to break from her usual massage routine and add in a few CranioSacral Therapy techniques. She knew CranioSacral Therapy could assess and address the deeper tissues in the body, affecting the neuromuscular system in a different way.

With the light touch of CranioSacral Therapy, she realized the tension in Jane’s body was not just muscular, but also deeper in her fascia and dural tube (the membranous dura mater that surrounds the spinal cord).

Weaving CranioSacral Therapy techniques into her massage routine over the next several sessions, Jane's therapist was able to get her deeper tissue to release and relax, taking pressure off of her nervous system, allowing for more movement and flexibility through her spine, and thus decreasing her mid-back pain.

Once this occurred, Jane and her therapist then recognized that the massage treatments were much more effective and long lasting.

Mechanisms of CranioSacral Therapy



How does CranioSacral Therapy address deep problem areas, especially with such a light touch?

CranioSacral Therapy techniques, developed by my father, osteopathic physician and surgeon John E. Upledger, D.O., were designed to improve the functioning of the craniosacral system,

which comprises the membranes and cerebrospinal fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord.

Through his participation in a neck surgery and several years of scientific research at Michigan State University with a team of physicians and Ph.D.s in anatomy, physics, biomechanics and biochemistry, Upledger observed and studied the functions and influence of the craniosacral system.

He created a model of the craniosacral system in which a specific rhythm is generated by the production, circulation and reabsorption of cerebrospinal fluid. This rhythm, called the craniosacral rhythm, is reflected throughout the entire body. It can be used in both assessment and treatment.

Upledger's research resulted in his development of a full-body protocol that allows practitioners to detect whether the system's rhythm is expressed within the body normally or abnormally based on the rhythm's symmetry, quality, amplitude and rate.

He found under normal circumstances that the craniosacral system operates on a six-second cycle: cerebrospinal fluid is produced for about three seconds and then the production system is shut down for about three seconds.

This creates a rhythmical rise and fall of fluid pressure within the system that is felt as the craniosacral rhythm. If the body is unable to move fully in response to this rhythm, then it is usually an indication of dysfunction or ill health.

Through several years of experimentation, Upledger also affirmed lighter forces produced better results. By introducing minimal corrective energy, practitioners are able to gently release restrictions and encourage the body to self-correct. The recommended touch is about 5 grams, the approximate force needed to raise a nickel with one finger.

As CranioSacral Therapy is a client-directed therapy, nonintrusive palpation allows the therapist to experience a sense of melding with the client that allows the therapist to follow the body's innate self-corrective process.

“When a practitioner supports and follows the tissue into the direction of ease (the direction the tissue moves most easily), the client's individual healing process arises in a highly efficient way,” explained Upledger CranioSacral Therapy instructor [Tad Wanveer, L.M.B.T., CST-D](#), who has a practice in North Carolina. “Assisting and following the tissue while using minimal force enables it to move into unique patterns of balanced tension.”

“Since the practitioner is supporting this balance, the tissue can release itself from adverse strain and reorganize into a more harmonious state,” he continued. “This is a key element of CranioSacral Therapy and is an approach that can be used in many manual techniques.”

Wanveer also noted CranioSacral Therapy can help determine where the individual, core issues reside.

“Feeling the body move in synchrony with the craniosacral rhythm can be used to efficiently locate areas of abnormal motion response. These areas usually require treatment and can be primary to the client's symptoms. With practice, it can take only minutes of light palpation to map the body's restrictive patterns,” he said.

Fascial restrictions often are the principal source of structural distortion, according to Wanveer. “If not addressed, they may remain as the pattern around which the body organizes and functions,” he explained.

“Whether therapy is focused on bone, muscle, joint, organ vessel or nerve, the fascia will be involved. Incorporating CranioSacral Therapy techniques, which enhance fascia mobility and balance, has been shown to increase the corrective response within the tissue.

“These CranioSacral Therapy techniques can be used effectively before, during or after other therapeutic techniques,” Wanveer added.

CranioSacral and Massage



CranioSacral Therapy helps a wide range of problems. Complementing the body’s natural healing capability, clients have reported CranioSacral Therapy led to improvement of a range of medical problems, including headaches, neck and back pain, temporomandibular joint syndrome (TMJ), central nervous system disorders, motor-coordination impairments, orthopedic problems, neurovascular or immune disorders, [fibromyalgia](#) and other connective-tissue disorders, learning challenges like ADD, emotional difficulties, as well as other ailments.

“Central and autonomic nervous system functions are pivotal forces that organize the body’s trillions of cells and processes to flow in an integrated, purposeful, balanced and graceful manner,” noted Wanveer.

“The cells of the central nervous system and the pre-ganglionic cells of the autonomic nervous system are found within the craniosacral system. Thus, adverse strain of the craniosacral system can result in central nervous system dysfunction, which can lead to a myriad of dysfunction, including pain syndromes.”

Besides helping pain and illness, clients find CranioSacral Therapy extremely relaxing and effective for reducing stress—and medical science now acknowledges that stress is a major contributor in many illnesses and diseases.

Craniosacral and massage together are [a winning combination](#).

Evolution of a Technique



John Matthew Upledger and his father, John E. Upledger, D.O.

I have watched the evolution of CranioSacral Therapy firsthand and eventually ended up making the ongoing education, training and availability of CranioSacral Therapy my life's work.

Over the years, I have seen how CranioSacral Therapy techniques have been incorporated into a range of healthcare practices—from a pediatric heart surgeon to a dentist specializing in TMJ to an esthetician doing facial and head massage to, of course, massage and manual therapists. CranioSacral Therapy has a place in many professions.

By adding CranioSacral Therapy to your massage practice, you will have another valuable tool for addressing client stress and pain.



[John Matthew Upledger](#) was the CEO of [Upledger Institute International](#).

For 30 years, he had been actively engaged in all aspects of the organization, from education to clinical services. His strict adherence to delivering high-quality continuing education solidly positioned the organization as a leading provider of manual therapy education.