

# An Overview of Craniosacral Therapy and its Application in Supporting the Health of Infants and Adults

*by Caroline Rhodes, P.T.*

Craniosacral therapy involves the gentle manipulation of the bones which form the head (cranial plates) and the triangular bone located at the base of the spine (sacrum). The cranial plates and the sacrum are joined by the spine. The spine and the sacrum are the fundamental frame supporting every element of the body, including organs, muscles, arteries, veins and nerves.

The principal elements of the nervous system are the brain, the spinal cord, and the nerve filaments throughout the body. The spinal cord is the primary nerve that carries all the nervous system signals from the network of nerve endings throughout the body to the brain. The brain and the spinal cord are surrounded by a tissue called dura. The dura is firmly attached to the cranium and to the sacrum. Therefore, motion of the cranial bones (head) is transmitted to the sacrum (pelvis).

A function of the dura is to contain the cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) produced by the brain. The cerebral spinal fluid flows throughout the central nervous system. The rhythmic flow of CSF and the connection of the dura to the cranium and sacrum produce conjoined movements between the bones of the head and the body. A Craniosacral therapist is able to detect the rhythmic movement by palpation.

Often, the free, rhythmic movement is obstructed and restricted by an incorrect position of some structural element of the body, due to the physical activities we perform, from sitting at a desk slouched-over in the seat, to physical injuries, whether in sports or work, or even in the process of birth. Restrictions in the movement of the structural elements of the body have a direct effect on the functions carried out by the systems of our body, including the digestive system and the blood circulatory system.

Gently guiding the movement of the head bones and sacrum to their original, full range of motion removes restrictions to movement. The most noticeable results of restoring the full range of motion to individual elements of the body is the resolution of dysfunctions manifested as symptoms.

## **Craniosacral Therapy for Infants**

Craniosacral therapy is effective in resolving a broad range of dysfunctions often observed in infants and children, including the following:

- ❑ Structural Impairments
  - Plagiocephaly – Asymmetrical head shape
  - Scoliosis – lateral curvature of the spine
  - Torticollis – head turned in one direction

## ❑ Functional Impairments

- Colic
- Reflux (spitting up)
- Poor sucking or not latching when breastfeeding
- Irritability
- Motor delay – not using all extremities equally or late in rolling, crawling etc.

Structural and functional impairments may be caused by the position of the baby in the womb and by the delivery. If the baby is unable to move adequately while in the womb, as may be the case when constrained against the mother's ribs or pelvis, anomalies in the infant's skeletal structure may develop.

During birth, the head of the newborn may drag against the surface of the mother's pelvis and alter the position of the head and neck bones. Due to the softness of an infant's bones, the use of forceps or ventouse to aid the delivery can change the shape of the infant's head by either compressing or elongating the cranium and may induce a misalignment between the head bones, the spine and the sacrum.

## **Asymmetrical head shape, Scoliosis and Torticollis**

It is generally advisable to seek an assessment for the proper alignment of the head bones, spine and pelvis soon after birth. Treatments for asymmetrical head shape, scoliosis and torticollis are gentle and non-intrusive. Correction of the impairments in the early stages of infancy will yield favorable results in the child's development and health.

If an infant's misshapen head does not assume a symmetric shape within the first week from birth, treatment becomes essential to ensure that any asymmetries are resolved before the cranial plates fuse naturally. A newborn's head has seven soft spots, which are actual gaps between the cranial plates. The gaps between the cranial plates gradually begin closing during the second month following birth. The process is generally completed when the child reaches the age of two years. The earlier the treatment begins, the more effective and immediate the results. The number of treatment sessions required for reshaping an infant's head depends on the age of the infant, the extent of the asymmetry, and the integrity of the blood vessels and nerves in the head and neck area.

## **Colic, Reflux, Irritability**

Craniosacral therapy is extremely effective in the treatment of colic, reflux and general infant irritability. A misalignment of the head bones, the spine and the sacrum may put pressure on the nerve which regulates the function of the digestive, respiratory and the blood circulatory systems. The nerve exits from a circular

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opening at the base of the head. If the bones at the base of the head are not aligned properly, the nerve is pinched as it exits the opening. The pinching compresses the nerve, affecting the function of the internal organs regulated by the nerve.

If colic is left untreated, the infant may eventually adapt and appear to recover. However, the underlying cause remains, and may manifest itself as constipation, diarrhea, abdominal pains and irritable bowel syndrome in later stages of the infant's development.

## **Adverse effects**

There are no known adverse effects induced by craniosacral therapy treatments. Nearly all mothers and babies find the treatment calming.

## **Treatment Sessions**

Before visiting our clinic for an assessment and treatment, we suggest that a referral be obtained from the infant's doctor. If possible, schedule the appointment during the period of the day when the baby normally eats or sleeps. We advise to bring a bottle or pacifier to the treatment sessions. A toy is helpful to entertain the child during the treatment sessions. Although infants may cry during the treatment sessions, we assure you it is not due to the treatment being painful. Interruptions such as constantly picking up the baby and diaper changes should be kept to a minimum during treatment sessions.

The treatment involves assessing the sucking of the infant during feeding and assessing the alignment of the spine and the craniosacral system. Home exercises may be assigned for mums to carry-out with newborns to expedite the effectiveness of the treatments.

## **Craniosacral Therapy for Adults**

Craniosacral therapy is effective in the treatment of a range of chronic and acute ailments, including the following:

- migraine headaches
- chronic neck and back pain
- chronic fatigue
- stress and tension-related dysfunctions

A significant number of individuals suffering chronic symptoms not alleviated by other methodologies currently in use have received benefit from Craniosacral therapy in resolving the cause producing the symptoms.

## **Additional Information**

We are happy to answer any questions you may have regarding Craniosacral therapy treatments. Feel free to contact us either by e-mail or by phone. Please, visit our

website for additional information on our treatments and the services we offer.

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