

Overview of Craniosacral Therapy (CST)

Introduction

Craniosacral Therapy (CST) is a form of bodywork that focuses on the craniosacral system and fascial system of the body. CST treatment techniques are hands-on, but gentle, non-forceful and non-invasive. Unlike chiropractic, CST never applies physical force to move bones or body structures. Unlike massage, CST applies only a very light touch or physical pressure and is usually done with patients fully clothed. Unlike physical therapy, CST does not exercise or “work” muscles or other body structures. Unlike Reiki or other “energy” work, CST involves actual physical touch and works directly with the CST and fascial system.

Craniosacral System (CSS)

The principal component of the craniosacral system (CSS) is a tough, waterproof, three-layer membrane (the outer membrane is called the Dura Mater) that is filled with cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). The Dura Mater attaches to the inside of the skull in the head (cranium) and to the sacrum and coccyx at the end of the spinal column (sacral), hence “craniosacral”. The Dura Mater forms a complete envelope or tube (sometimes called the Dural Tube) around the brain and spinal cord, the central nervous system of the body. The CSF supplies vital nutrients to the brain and spinal cord and circulates hormones, neurotransmitters, and immune cells.

Fascial System

The fascial system is a network of fascial or connective tissue that connects all parts of the body. A superficial or outer layer of fascia forms a huge body stocking under the skin that holds the body together. Fascia tissue surrounds the Dura Mater and all internal organs. At the muscular-skeletal level, it has been described as a “pervasive network of ropes and guy wires and sheets of fabric to which adjacent muscles attach, and which are anchored to the significant protuberances of the skeleton. Through it everything is ultimately attached to everything else. Minor alterations in any portion of the network affect the distribution of tension throughout.” Fascial tissue also forms a sheath around each bone, ligament, tendon, and every muscles, every individual muscle fiber, and every nerve fiber—all the way down to the cellular level. The combined fascia of the body forms a single fascial system that physically interconnects all parts of the body.

Cranial Rhythm

In an action similar to a hydraulic pump, the CSS produces, circulates and reabsorbs cerebrospinal fluid, creating a cranial pulse or rhythm. The cranial rhythm is separate and distinct from the pulse rate (rhythm of blood circulation), breathing rate (rhythm of respiration), and other rhythms of body. Cranial rhythm is usually 6 to 12 cycles per minute. The cranial rhythm is carried to all parts of the body through the fascial system, like ripples from a rock thrown in a still pond, and can be monitored by light touch on almost any part of the body. The hydraulic pump for the CSS is the gentle rocking motion (flexion and extension) of the sphenoid bone (which holds the pituitary gland) on a clamshell-like hinge joint with the occiput.

Sources of Dysfunctions

In the fascial system, deep fascia can thicken and lose flexibility in response to chronic tension in muscles. Also scar tissue (formed from physical injuries, surgeries or diseases) is shorter and less flexible

than the original fascia. Fevers, chemicals, hormones, and chronic dehydration can change the collagen substance of fascia, causing muscles to become “glued” together and unable to slide across each other. Injuries, stresses, strains, sprains and other effects of working, playing and living can introduce structural misalignments or imbalances in the cranial bones and attaching membranes of the Dura Mater, particularly the falx and tentorium membranes. This, in turn, can disrupt the normal rise and fall of CSF pressure in the Dural Tube, often leading to a build-up of excess pressure, which causes many dysfunctions.

CST Philosophy-Wisdom of the Body

CST grows out of a philosophy that the human body is a complex, holistic system with intelligence and memory down to the cellular level. This intelligence and memory includes internal knowledge about its optimal functional state (homeostasis), knowledge of what may be wrong with any part of it at any given time, and knowledge about what it needs to heal itself from any injury or dysfunction. However, because of disruptions in the craniosacral system or the fascial system, the body may not have the vital energy necessary to fully recover from certain injuries or dysfunctions on its own. The body is willing to accept help from another person in order to overcome these roadblocks or barriers to self-healing. In CST, the prevailing assumption is not “the therapist knows best”, but rather the “body knows best.”

CST Techniques-Following the Body

Consistent with the CST philosophy, CST treatment techniques are all based on “following the body”. This involves monitoring the cranial rhythm at different parts of the body, looking at movement or lack of movement in various parts of the body, and assessing imbalances and non-symmetrical structures or facial features. Treatment is light physical touch in which the electrical energy of the therapists hands (measured at about 200-1000 picoamps) helps the patient’s body overcome the roadblocks or barriers to homeostasis.

Principal CST treatment techniques include (but are not limited to) the following:

Diaphragm Work: With light touch above and below the major diaphragms, roadblocks or barriers connected with that diaphragm are released to allow more unrestricted flow of energy. The major diaphragms are the pelvic, respiratory, thoracic inlet and occipital-atlantal (OA).

Unwinding Joints: With light touch above and below a joint, the range of motion is gently explored and encouraged in the direction of ease or least resistance. This results in greater range of motion and function of the joint, and often releases pain in that area.

Correcting Cranial Rhythm: With light touch on parts of the body that easily show the cranial rhythm, the therapist can help the body achieve improved balance and symmetry in cranial pulse in the head, body and extremities.

Cranial Bone Work: With light touch on various cranial bones (parietal, frontal, sphenoid, temporal, occiput), the therapist can help release or decompress tension or folds that affect the falx and tentorium membranes that are critical to the CCS.

Dural Tube Glide: A special CST technique gently stretches the Dural Tube to release any adhesions.

Sacral Base Release: A special CST technique gently releases the sacrum.

Conclusion

We hope this brief overview will help you understand the body’s intricate craniosacral system (CSS) and better appreciate the body’s built-in wisdom regarding health and wellness. We also hope you will have a clearer view of the philosophy, treatment techniques and healing power of craniosacral therapy (CST) as offered by VIS medicine.