



## Craniosacral Therapy

### **Craniosacral Therapy: History and the Future**



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When I opened my clinic, the CranioSacral Institute of Michigan, just 4 years ago, I spent most of my time explaining what this “new” therapy was. It is encouraging that, while many do not understand what it is, many have now “heard of” this powerful therapy. What has become confusing is the myriad of different names: craniosacral, cranio-sacral, cranial sacral and sacro-occipital. To understand the different names is to understand where this “new” therapy came from. I will refer to them in general as CST.

The philosophy and historical basis of CST originates from osteopathy. Osteopathy was founded by Andrew T. Still, MD, DO in the late 1800’s. His path as a physician led him to teach the principles that are still the foundation of this work.

Body unity - the body is a functioning unit, you must look at the whole to address issues or concerns.

Self Regulation - the body self regulates and tends towards healing or balance.

Structure and Function are inter-related – to learn how/why something is formed you must look at its function and vice versa.

Medications are harmful – Dr. Still was adamant that drugs were not healthy for the body. This philosophy was added when he lost his family to meningitis...the drug of choice at the time was mercury.

From Still’s work was born the Doctor of Osteopathy programs. One of Still’s most passionate students was William Sutherland, DO. Sutherland became enthralled with the cranial bones (bones of the skull), so much so that he performed experiments on himself in which he would cause malalignment or reduce the natural movement of his own cranial bones. He kept close notes on the symptoms that he would experience. He also had to develop specific techniques to undo the problems he had self-inflicted. Thus, cranial osteopathy was born. Sutherland’s work still stands as the basis of all this work.

In the 1970’s a curious physician named John Upledger, DO forged the path of applying gentle pressures instead of the heavier handed osteopathic approach used by the cranial osteopaths of the time. His work, and the institute he developed, brought great awareness to this work and hallmarked the training of non-osteopath health professionals. Since that time, there have been a number of practitioners that have continued to build on this philosophy, thus giving us the myriad of different names. Each takes a slightly different approach, or has developed different specific techniques. It is important to remember that regardless of what therapy you choose, the goal is the same...to improve and optimize the function of the craniosacral system.

The craniosacral system is the system of the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). This fluid flows around the brain and spinal cord, providing nutrients and eliminating waste products. It is important that this system works efficiently for the brain and spinal cord to work optimally. The therapist can assess bone movement and subtle tissue changes to find areas of restriction. Once areas of concern are detected, there are gentle, very specific techniques to realign the system. The results can be profound, with improvements routinely seen in everything from orthopedic, neurological, or metabolic issues to emotional relaxation and a sense of balance.

With so many different therapies the challenge can be finding the right practitioner or approach for you. Some practitioners may present CST as “energy work”. As a CST practitioner, one must be aware of working with an energetic system. Sutherland felt that the CSF was the “highest frequency fluid” of the body. It is common to feel heat or other “energetic” responses to this type of work. Indeed it is well documented that there are specific changes in motion and rhythm of this system when working with issues that fall in the emotional realm. For this reason, CST is a profound technique that can open the door for self healing on any level the client wishes to heal... physical, emotional, or spiritual. The way that a CST practitioner facilitates this process is via the craniosacral system, therefore the practitioner should be engaged with the physical tissues in order for it to be considered CST.

The best way to find the right practitioner for you is to ask questions. Practitioners may be physical therapists, occupational therapists, nurses, chiropractors, physicians or massage therapists. It is important to know when looking for a practitioner that massage therapy is a non-licensed field in the state of Michigan. All credible CST curriculae advise that CST by itself does not give permission to perform these hands-on therapies. The minimum requirement is that of a trained massage therapist.

Websites available to search for practitioners are: [www.iahp.com](http://www.iahp.com). or [www.craniosacraltherapy.org](http://www.craniosacraltherapy.org). For more information about this topic, or for personal recommendations in your area, visit [www.csiofmi.com](http://www.csiofmi.com).

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