

Foreword by Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

*From My*  
**Hands and Heart**



Achieving Health and Balance  
with Craniosacral Therapy

**Kate Mackinnon**

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This poem by Nancy Levin was inspired by her experience of craniosacral therapy, and it is reprinted with grateful permission.

## whole

*while her hands navigate  
the map my body makes,  
it's the radiating rhythm  
of vibration and stillness  
that now allows me  
to receive what it hides  
and translate all it has to tell.*

*this journey to knowing,  
deep in my essence,  
that i am loved.  
no matter what i do or don't do,  
even if i don't do anything i will be loved.*

*but to believe, i needed courage.  
i found it in my body.*

*my body,  
a treasure chest,  
its cellular secrets under lock and key  
until the moment they were ready to be freed.*

*in the body  
love first develops as hunger.  
these walls have cellular memory.  
there is a haunting here.*

*tight fitting skin,  
barely wrapping bones  
in dehydrated desert conditions  
are infused with vitality  
fleshed out and expanded  
nourished and recalibrated*

*buoyant.*

*sensation returning and there,  
my breath still held,  
i felt full for the first time.*

*my power is very confusing.  
and although my legs just want to run  
i can feel my feet begin to find their roots,  
sourcing safety for my strength.*

*i found my grounding  
and what feeds me  
in asking for help  
from an intuitive hand.*

*my body,  
once a fortress,  
now begs for entry  
and re-entry.*

*the thaw begins like this,  
after being frozen in place  
for so long,  
waves of flame and prayer  
release me,  
finally locating the passage  
from my heart,  
revealing the way to healing.*

*and so in the softening,  
i learn that love  
presents in many forms:  
in flames on candles carried  
in kisses and wishes of peace  
in snow surrounding a mountain waterfall.*

*my body melts  
outside its lines.*

*my thoughts,  
my own*

*for the first time.*

*and as pieces of me  
return or arrive,  
desire alone senses  
the rise and fall  
of what's alive  
inside.*

*and now,  
stripped of all  
i once defined  
myself by,  
it takes only a moment  
to notice  
i have always been  
whole.*



# FOREWORD

A few years back I knew very little about the subject of craniosacral therapy (CST). On a couple of occasions I had been approached by people who called themselves CST practitioners and offered a session. However, the truth is I felt nothing and was unable to notice any appreciable improvements of any kind. Basically I'd experience a relaxing hour, express my appreciation, and that would be the end of the story. While I did not discount the potential healing potentialities of CST, I was somewhat skeptical of this whole idea of moving invisible energy around by feeling rhythms and extending a gentle touch. As the Broadway song from *A Chorus Line* says, I tried it and I felt nothing.

That is until I began a series of surprising and extraordinary sessions of CST with the author of this book, Kate Mackinnon. I had my very first session with Kate back in February 2010, shortly after I had received the diagnosis of chronic lymphocytic leukemia. I was at a very low energy level at the time and still somewhat in shock at this new status in my life. I was blessed to have this exceptional healer give me two CST sessions daily for several days.

From the very first moment of my very first session with Kate, I felt a source of energy moving through my entire body as I lay there on the massage table. That session was a transformative experience for me; when it was complete, I knew that something stupendous had just taken place. Something I couldn't define was happening in my head and traveling down through my spine. I felt reenergized, lighter, and in a state of gratitude to God for having sent this amazing woman to me at that troubling time in my life.

Kate performed two sessions a day with me for four days. On two occasions she actually carried out her CST work on me while I floated in the ocean with her. I went from being a skeptic to a firm believer in this practice as a means to providing healing energy in lieu of the harsher and riskier modalities offered in the allopathic medical model.

I am now in my seventh decade, and after being a very active athlete for

my entire adult life—running many competitive marathons, playing tournament-level tennis daily for over three decades, and practicing yoga and long-distance swimming—my body has reacted to this physical fitness regimen with a long list of pains and challenging ailments. I have found that Kate Mackinnon’s gentle-touch CST therapy has been an absolute miracle for me in sending away any annoying discomfort.

I call Kate my miracle worker; in fact I have been so impressed and positively impacted by the skill of this woman that I have asked her to work with several members of my family and introduced her to many of my friends and colleagues as well. Without exception, every single person who participated in a CST session with Kate—even those who are most dubious about energy medicine and anything that is a not a sound, scientifically proven medical treatment—had the same reaction as I did.

In the introduction to my recently published book *Wishes Fulfilled*, I included a summary of a CST session that Kate did with a young woman, Nicollette, who suffered from a severe case of Bell’s palsy. The elimination of the facial paralysis within a very short time was attributable, in part, to the work Kate did with her.

On a tour of Assisi, Lourdes, and Medjugorje in 2011 called “Experiencing the Miraculous,” Kate offered CST sessions to scores of spiritual seekers who went on this journey with me. Without exception the reports that came back were all in the “she is amazing, I feel better than I have in years” category. The same reports always come back whenever I ask Kate to offer a CST session. It is like having a massage for my soul. Indeed, she has taken the practice of CST to an entirely new level of healing.



I have been so impressed by the opportunities that CST offers, not only for healing, but for creating a sense of well-being and inner peace when rendered by an accomplished practitioner, that I asked Kate to write her own book on how to achieve a sense of balance and renewed health through craniosacral therapy. She brings her many years of research and practice to this book that you are about to read.

I am so very pleased to write a few words of introduction to this remarkable book. It is truly a treasure filled with practical tips on how to alleviate tension and stress that have long resided in the body. This is not a technical manual for those who wish to learn how to become a craniosacral

therapist; rather, it is written for the layperson who desires to feel better, who wishes to alleviate any nagging discomforts and utilize a healing modality that does not involve prescription drugs or even more radical approaches such as surgery.

I have long believed that there is a spiritual solution to every problem. Having had over 50 sessions with Kate over the past years and having observed her help so many of my friends, colleagues, and family members without the use of any drugs or physical manipulations, I feel the presence of a spirit at work with her in a very big way. This is a subtle and intuitive approach to healing, and Kate has put her own intuition into the writing of this book as well.

After years of study and practice Kate has come to trust in her own abilities to feel through her hands and her heart, and she has skillfully put her subtle healing awareness into the pages of this book. I enthusiastically endorse the work of this highly skilled, intuitive, spiritually based healer, whom I am proud to call my friend and colleague.

I encourage you to pay close attention to what this phenomenal teacher has to offer you concerning craniosacral therapy as an alternative to the far more extreme options that are generally offered through the medical model. I take every opportunity I can to have a CST session with Kate. I treat it like an energy tune-up for my body and my spirit as well. Read this book carefully, with a mind that is open to everything and attached to nothing. It offers you a way to greater health and well-being using a therapeutic method that you may never have considered before.

Craniosacral therapy has become part of my way of life since the day that Kate came to me with her skilled hands, her graceful heart, and her intention to be an instrument of healing for me. Ralph Waldo Emerson once observed that “God enters by a private door into every individual.” To me Kate has been God’s able and noble assistant. She opened a new door that has brought me to never-before-imagined levels of joy, healing, and wellness. May you experience the same as you begin your own journey with my personal craniosacral therapist, Kate Mackinnon. You are in good hands.

— Dr. Wayne W. Dyer





# INTRODUCTION

Since my very first days working as a physical therapist, I've seen how patients' emotional and spiritual well-being deeply connect to their physical well-being. I met scores of patients just before their surgeries, and those who had the smoothest recoveries were the ones who saw their surgery as a means to help them with their next adventures in life. Their positive perceptions of the procedure influenced the outcomes. In contrast, some patients who were admitted into the hospital stated flatly that they had come in to die. No matter what medications, surgery, or therapies they were offered, nothing could be done to alter their chosen path.

With my training in the traditional paradigm of Western medicine, it seemed heretical at first to consider that patients' feelings and perceptions could dictate therapeutic outcomes. However, as I saw time and again, our emotional states do affect how we get sick and how well we heal. When we feel stressed, for example, our nervous systems activate the fight-or-flight response. Many of us are living in a constant state of high alert for one reason or another, which keeps our nervous systems ramped up and prevents us from healing well.

Although my physical therapy teachers insisted that we were implementing a holistic approach, the work felt rote and disjointed, not "whole" at all. We were taught to break things down mechanistically and focus on physical symptoms (for example, "decreased range of motion," "chest pain," or "shortness of breath"), combine this with the right test results, and sum it all up with a final prognosis and treatment plan. We figured that if we got the assessment right, the treatment would work. Meanwhile, our patients' emotional states—and therefore the states of their nervous systems—were not assessed with the same level of rigor.

When I took my first class in craniosacral therapy (CST), I finally began to understand how to use a truly holistic approach to support people to heal. CST could treat my clients' physical symptoms, while also relieving the underlying stresses that were hidden in the body. As I worked with my clients, their long-standing illnesses improved; injuries healed; and chronic

pain and tension in the jaw, lower back, and neck disappeared, and didn't return. Traditional medical treatments would've involved painkillers, stretching exercises, or perhaps surgical interventions! Although this is effective in alleviating pain in the short term, it does not address the true source of discomfort in order to prevent it from manifesting in another part of the body. On my treatment table, with CST, I can get to the source of a person's symptoms.

A craniosacral therapist uses gentle touch to map the body's responses to stress and injury—sometimes from a recent accident or illness, and sometimes long-ago trauma—and then supports the body in releasing them. This alleviates pain and discomfort, and promotes healing. CST is a partnership between therapist and patient that reads messages the body is sending through where it holds tension and stress. Once we pay attention to what our bodies know, we have a much better chance of becoming whole again.



I'm frequently asked, "How did you end up learning CST?" I first trained as a physiotherapist (physical therapist) in Scotland in the late '80s. I subsequently worked in hospitals in Oxford and London, spending time in several different areas of medicine before deciding to specialize in pediatrics, and eventually heading a team of community pediatric physical therapists.

I heard of CST for the first time while working with a child with cerebral palsy. When her family told me about it, I was very skeptical. Looking back, I see that I was coming from a place of ignorance—I felt threatened due to a misplaced sense of ownership over my patients' outcomes. My outdated idea of the therapist/patient relationship was one in which only I knew what was best, and I alone should control the direction of therapy. I thought that this child's family looking to augment her care implied that I was ineffective. I now see that this kind of relationship does a disservice to my patients, and I actively encourage them to research other healing modalities.

CST captured my attention again when my friend Paola received it before seeing her dentist for a complex issue. She experienced amazing relief and insight, realizing that unmet grief over her mother's death was depleting the energy she needed to heal her problem. After just one CST

session, she was able to have a much less invasive dental procedure than had originally been predicted.

After hearing about Paola's results, I decided to go to a CST demonstration at a pediatric physical therapy conference. Unlike many other therapies, an observer often doesn't see much happening, so CST can be very boring to watch. However, for those receiving or performing it, there is a lot of activity that can be felt in the body. I came away not much clearer on what the therapy was, exactly, but I was intrigued by the results people were getting. It wasn't until I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, and began jumping through the many hoops necessary to get my California physical therapy license, that I took my first CST class with the Upledger Institute. After that, I was completely hooked.

I want to share my journey with you in this book so that you too can glimpse the secrets your body is holding and learn how to release the healthy you. You may have heard the term *craniosacral therapy* but don't know what it's all about. Or maybe you're looking for hope, new options, and solutions to your health problems. You may even be receiving CST now, and still not fully understand how it works.

My aim is to explain the science behind this effective therapy in a way that will be understandable to people with no medical background. You'll also read stories about people who have used CST to support their recovery from a wide variety of health challenges. These case studies will give you a better understanding of not just the theory behind CST, but the practice as well.

Many of my clients have said that they don't know how to describe some of the sensations they've felt during sessions, and have great difficulty telling their friends about it. This is one of the challenges in writing or speaking about CST; since there's an energetic aspect to the therapy as well as a physical one, it can be hard to put the experience into words. In this book, I attempt to give you a concrete framework to understand this work.



Another challenge in writing a book on CST is choosing what information to include, as the field has a long history and a wide scope of practice and application that is always evolving. My training is with the Upledger Institute, which was founded by Dr. John Upledger, the original developer of craniosacral therapy. The Upledger Institute conducts research

in the CST field and provides a rigorous curriculum to train practitioners. There are also other schools of thought and training in the craniosacral field that produce talented practitioners. And while there's much discussion about the merits of different theories, at the end of the day I suspect we access the same places in the body and spirit; it's just the theoretical framework that's described in different ways.

If you wish to achieve a more solid grounding in CST, there are many excellent books of a more technical nature concerning Upledger theory and practice that are written for the therapist. However, I felt the existing literature was missing a book that helps laypersons understand the work, inspires them to receive CST, and gives them tools to enhance their experience.

I recommend that you read this book from front to back. The first chapter gives an overview of the therapy and explains how CST is rooted in a deep understanding of the physical functioning of the body as well as the energetic part of ourselves. The second chapter takes a brief look at the history of CST, then describes the training required of a craniosacral therapist, explaining techniques and theories as they're presented in the curriculum. Chapter Three discusses what to expect when you receive a typical CST session, and notes the kinds of changes you may experience as a result of the therapy. In Chapter Four we'll explore one of the foundational concepts of Upledger CST, the "inner wisdom." You'll read examples of how, with the right support, the body knows how to heal itself, and learn how to support your own healing process. Then in Chapter Five you'll read several case studies to highlight some of the many conditions CST has helped resolve.

The last three chapters of the book present ways to become actively involved in your own care and maximize the benefits you can get from CST. Chapter Six discusses how to find the right practitioner and how your CST might fit in with other modalities you are engaged in. Chapter Seven gives you concrete examples of how to maintain your results to get the most out of your CST sessions, both while you're on the table and then at home. Finally, in Chapter Eight I explain simple, hands-on techniques you can do for yourself, your friends, and your family. There is also a Glossary at the end of this book to help you keep track of the vocabulary used in CST, and a Resources section with information on various websites, books, and practitioners that will support you in learning more.

I trust that *From My Hands and Heart* will serve you well, and you'll come to know and love craniosacral therapy as much as I do.



# *Chapter One*

## **DEFINING CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY**

I can still clearly recall my first experience of craniosacral therapy. As my therapist began to work, I felt that CST was different from anything I had experienced before: her hands went exactly where I wanted them to go without my saying a word. Her touch didn't probe or hurt at all.

During the session, it became clear that I had not yet fully grieved the miscarriage I had suffered a few weeks earlier. Since my tears had stopped and I was living life normally again, I thought I had moved on. But I learned in that first hour of CST that my body and my heart had not. Physically, I began to feel more open and relaxed through my pelvis. During and after that session, I found myself delving deeper into my grief and shedding fresh tears that helped me heal. It was fascinating to me that it felt safe and natural to be so open in front of my therapist. At the time, I was not used to showing my emotions, and my habit was to stuff all those uncomfortable feelings and sensations away. And yet, despite feeling such deep sadness, I felt very peaceful and relaxed after my session, and that peace stayed with me. I knew without a doubt that I should continue receiving this work.

With just one session, CST had me fully engaged. I wanted to know as much as possible about it, and I started on a journey that has given me my life's work. Many of my clients today show the same curiosity I did: they want to know just what this therapy is about, how it works, why they feel what they do in session, and why my hands go where they need them most. Clients will say they don't know how to explain what they are feeling on the table, yet they know it is important and real. I repeatedly hear, "I know what it feels like for me, but I don't know how to explain it to my friends."

It's clear to me that the best way to understand CST is to receive the work and have it be a felt sense in your body. However, this answers the

question only for yourself! By nature, CST is very individualized. A session is tailored to your needs on each day and in each moment, so there are myriad variations you might experience. Techniques vary from session to session, and the insights and sensations experienced will be so very personal. CST experiences are also influenced by the therapists themselves, based on their level of experience, the amount of work they personally receive, the fit between therapist and client, and their other complementary skills. However, there are basic tenets of the work that will help you understand what's happening for you on the table.

In this chapter, I'll provide you with a basic framework of what CST is and explain how it works with both the physical and energetic components of ourselves. Later I'll present a case study to show you how CST helped someone not only deal with chronic pain, but also release long-standing patterns of strain in his body to change many other aspects of his life.

## ***The Power of Safe and Gentle Touch***

The most succinct and complete definition of CST I have come across is “the healing power of a gentle touch.” This is the phrase used on the front of the Upledger Institute pamphlet for CST, and it's true, albeit a little short on details! When asked, many therapists resort to just describing the process of the therapy. But that's seldom satisfying to people, because it doesn't address how the therapy can help them or what they can expect to experience in a session. And of course, without knowing why someone's asking, it's tempting to just catalog all the kinds of conditions CST can help, and that's not a definition at all.

Craniosacral therapy is a highly effective light-touch therapy that works with the whole body and the source of pain and dysfunction simultaneously. For the most part, our bodies do an amazing job of finding ways to work around the stresses and strains caused by traumatic life experiences, such as chronic stress, childhood falls, or illnesses. Take, for example, an early childhood fall down some stairs: the body might work around pain and stiffness in the tailbone by tucking it forward slightly, lessening stiffness there temporarily but putting strain up the spine in the long term. When a work-around is no longer effective, or the body has too many of them to comfortably function, we feel pain or discomfort.

With CST we recognize that, given proper support, the body will heal itself, creating a custom solution to any problem that is causing discomfort.

Therapists place their hands over the area of the body that is most related to the source of the problem, and supports the body both physically and energetically to make whatever corrections it needs. Therapists' hands are trained to feel and monitor changes in the body's tissues to a very high degree of sensitivity. In the process of monitoring what is happening in the client's body, therapists' hands follow change as it occurs rather than making the decision to move a person's body in any given direction. This is a principal difference between CST and most other therapeutic types of bodywork.



Safe, gentle touch—a basic premise of this therapy—has a powerful effect. Touch has been used since ancient times in all cultures for supporting people's healing processes. The need for it is so deeply hardwired into our nervous systems that babies die when they are not touched enough.

Think back to a time when you were under a lot of stress in your life. How often during that time did you withdraw from those around you? In truth, the best support in stressful times would be for you to reach out physically to your friends and loved ones. The act of touching can be a profound and deeply meaningful act. Sometimes all you need during a hard time is a friend to place a hand on your arm and sit with you. And a hug at the right moment can be the perfect support.

We have many nerve endings in our skin that are designed specifically to respond to touch. When we are touched in a way that's supportive and not invasive, we can relax. There's a quality in that kind of touch through which we feel heard. In CST we call this *blending and melding* with the tissue, and it's a cornerstone of the work. An experienced therapist has mastered the highly tuned skill of feeling what's happening within different anatomical structures in the body, such as the bones and soft tissue, with the least amount of intrusion possible. When people first receive this kind of touch they'll often comment on it, saying something like, "I can't tell the difference between your hand and my body. It feels like they are connected."

## ***The Physical Nature of CST***



The word *craniosacral* breaks down into *cranio*, which is a prefix that refers to the *cranium*, our skull; and *sacral*, which refers to the *sacrum*, a triangular-shaped bone at the end of our spine that connects with the lumbar vertebrae and the tailbone. These two structures are the outer boundaries of the *craniosacral system*. You can feel the boundaries of your craniosacral system by putting one hand on your head and the other on your sacrum. To find your sacrum, feel down your back along your vertebrae. After you feel the last one at the base of your spine in your lower back, your hand is then resting on your sacrum.

These two bony places, the cranium and sacrum, provide the hard outer protection for the brain and spinal cord, which make up the *central nervous system*. These structures are further supported by membranes that line the bones, and the fluid that fills those membranes, which provide cushioning for the brain and spinal cord. The craniosacral system is at the very core of our being; disturbances in this system create disease or disharmony in the body as a whole. Likewise, problems in the body also reflect back to the craniosacral system, putting it under strain.

The fluid in the craniosacral system is called *cerebrospinal fluid*, and it is vital to the practice of CST. It exhibits a gentle rhythmic motion throughout our lives: the *craniosacral rhythm* (CSR). This rhythm is created within the craniosacral system itself through rising and lowering pressure, and it can be felt anywhere on the body. In most adults, it cycles 10 to 12 times a minute. Craniosacral therapists rely on the CSR for information on how to conduct their sessions. They use it to evaluate how well the body is functioning as a whole, and also to identify and pinpoint where specific difficulties are located. It's so important, one of my most respected teachers tells his students, "If you're not paying attention to the rhythm, you're not performing craniosacral therapy."

Although I had a solid training in anatomy and physiology from my physical therapy training, my knowledge was deepened further when I learned the detailed anatomy involved in CST, such as how the bones of the cranium relate to each other and to the structures and fluid that support the brain from within. This level of detail helped me understand the physical makeup of the craniosacral system, and appreciate how important its smooth functioning is for every system in the body.

## ***The Energetic Nature of CST***

In order to receive CST, it's not necessary to believe in the energetic component of the work. You can have effective sessions without even mentioning the word *energy*. Changes felt in the body can be described in words that are already familiar. For example, I may ask clients if they can feel heat coming from the area we are working with. That's the release of energy, but it's just as accurate to say that it's a release of heat. This practical and down-to-earth approach helps just about everybody relate to CST, without there being a "something" you have to believe in for the therapy to work for you.

Talking about "energy" and "energy work" can make people uncomfortable. But if you take a moment to think about it, we come into this world as energetic beings. Babies are very responsive to their environment and seem to have an uncanny ability to sense what is going on. Any mother can tell you that when she's feeling a little out of sorts, her baby is also cranky. (In my case, when my twins were born I had two cranky babies on my hands!)

This ability of a baby to judge energetic intent was clearly demonstrated to me when I worked on my friend's newborn, who was just 24 hours old. She had been born at home and was sleeping very contentedly. As I held her and gently checked in with her CSR, she opened her eyes and looked directly at me, as if to say, "Do you know what you are doing?" I assume I passed the test, as she soon closed her eyes and I felt the restriction I had noticed release.

People are familiar with touch: we can see it and feel what we see! With energy, however, we can certainly feel it, but we don't see it. And while you may be comfortable touching your friends and loved ones with a hug or a back rub, most people are not so comfortable with the idea of working with energy, even though it's energy that makes the hug feel comforting and the back rub feel supportive. However, energy is not so strange a concept as some people may think. After all, many of us have had the experience of feeling that somebody is looking at us while our back is turned. I think that we use this sixth sense—our energetic awareness—all the time.

We are energetic beings. Anything that has vibratory motion between its atoms has energy. Even the particles that make up the atom are in motion. In Native American mythology, a stone has its own vibration and, therefore, energy. When I first learned this upon moving to America, it seemed like a bizarre concept to me, but now it seems obvious. Each object

has its own molecular makeup, with unique opportunities for movement and vibration. When we start to look closely at our environment, we notice that everything has vibration and an innate intelligence.

Energetic exchanges take place even in allopathic medicine when, for example, therapeutic radiation is used to treat cancer or when ultrasound is used to help with pain and inflammation. Touch also involves an exchange of energy, which influences our being in a powerful way. As craniosacral therapists, we are taught how to pay attention to these changes in the energy system of the body. Most times, as a therapist notices a shift in a person's energy, clients can feel a response in their physical body, usually along with a sense of relaxation, a feeling of the body softening and opening.

### ***The Use of CST in Different Settings***

Craniosacral therapy can be combined seamlessly with most medical interventions. Practitioners from both Western- and alternative-medicine backgrounds incorporate CST skills into their work. CST is performed by doctors, dentists, physical and occupational therapists, acupuncturists, massage therapists, and many other types of practitioners. More than 100,000 people in over 60 countries have taken at least one class in CST with the Upledger Institute since its founding some 30 years ago. I think one reason so many practitioners use CST is because it works with the physical structure and function of the body, along with actively working with the body's energetic systems. It's the perfect combination of conventional allopathic medicine and energy medicine.

CST does not need to be a replacement for any other form of treatment; it can be combined with most treatments, whether mainstream or alternative, to create a powerful partnership. I work with many clients who have complex medical needs, and I am just one member of their health-care teams. I usually work in my office, but I have, on occasion, worked with my clients while they're in the hospital. Some of these clients need a lot of medical treatments, and I support their team in helping the outcome be more successful. For instance, no matter how skilled a surgeon may be, surgery is still a significant trauma for the body to heal from. There is also a chemical effect on the body from anesthesia, and the invasive nature of being intubated (inserting a breathing tube). Without help, the body can be left in considerable discomfort. Although the surgical site will heal, the way

in which the body does repairs can create strain and tension at the incision or beyond, often leading to pain and restricted movement.

CST helps the body find a more efficient way to heal by releasing strain, resulting in reduced pain and increased range of motion. When the body is under tension, it has to do extra work to compensate. This uses up energy and creates strain. Once we no longer have to work so hard around this built-up tension, we have more energy available to us, and this gives a feeling of greater vitality.

I also often work with people who have had repeated dental work. There is an intimate physical relationship between the roof of the mouth and the bones that form the floor of the brain cavity. And sometimes a lot of force is required to complete a dental procedure, creating a torsion or shear in the tissues of the mouth. This leads not only to an imbalance in the jaw, but a disruption in the smooth functioning of the nervous system. Looking at this strictly from a physical-function perspective, CST can help directly with the bones of the face and jaw, ensuring that they are moving freely, and that the nerves have adequate room. This reduces pain significantly, and in some cases can even correct a misaligned bite.

Dental work is also inherently invasive and is often associated with pain. In a CST session, as the tissues let go of tension, clients often remember their dental procedures. This gives their bodies the opportunity to release any emotions that went along with them. As tissues continue to normalize, it's not uncommon for clients to notice a fleeting taste of the medication that was used. When you hear or read about these things, it certainly can sound weird, but when you're receiving therapy, it just feels great!

Injuries that occur when we're under emotional stress are often more complex and take longer to heal. CST helps the body release those traumas. Imagine knowing that when you next need a dental procedure you can go in relaxed, because any discomfort that comes from that procedure can be relieved. CST sessions can be useful both before and after dental work to support successful outcomes.

Babies and children can also benefit greatly from CST. Working with this population requires that you be very skilled at *palpation* and have a deep understanding of how to hold a *neutral* presence. I have found that children with disabilities are very sensitive to a clinician's therapeutic intent. I've worked with children who have been able to feel my hand held from a distance of a full foot behind them. Some then turned around and tapped

my hand away because I was not in a neutral enough place while others have taken my hand and placed it exactly where they needed it.

Amazing benefits can result from working with children. You'll find more case studies later in this book, but I'll share one with you here now.

A woman came to me with her four-year-old son, who was having difficulties paying attention in preschool and sitting still in circle time. He had sensory issues starting from birth: he was a very colicky baby and required medication for reflux. After just one session (which we spent softening his respiratory diaphragm, stomach area, and cranial base), his teachers observed that he was having a much easier time at school and asked his mother if she had been trying anything new at home with him. This was great confirmation for her that progress was being made.

### ***The Importance of the Therapist Receiving CST***

One thing I've seen time and again: the clearer I am as a practitioner, the more my clients experience possibilities for change. By "clearer" I mean my equilibrium is not as easily disturbed by what a client might be experiencing. For example, let's say a woman comes to see me with neck pain following a car accident in which she was rear-ended by someone on a cell phone, and I've recently had a similar accident. If I am not neutral, I could easily start remembering the feelings from my own accident. I would not be able to maintain a neutral or a relaxed place in my body: my heart rate would increase and my muscles would tense, changing how my hands connect to the person I'm working on. This would be felt by my client on the table, who would then perceive that it wasn't safe to release the tension and emotions in her body.

Being clear is another way of describing my therapeutic presence, which is the way I act and carry myself (my way of being) that tells my clients they are safe. That's why an essential part of being an effective craniosacral therapist is to receive CST, so that as little unresolved tension as possible is present in my body. All the seasoned practitioners I know receive regular CST sessions and maintain other self-care or spiritual practices that help them stay *grounded* and present as they work. Being less affected by whatever a client is dealing with means that my work is more effective and I will not be drained at the end of the day.

CST has supported me through a lot of events, some routine and some not. For example, I had a CST session right before I went to Europe with Dr.

Wayne Dyer on the tour that he was hosting, “Experiencing the Miraculous.” Wayne had mentioned that he might have me come onstage to talk a little about CST. I was feeling a great deal of anxiety and concern that I was not going to be good enough. The conversation in my head was, *Who do you think you are, talking about CST when there so many better practitioners than you who should be doing this?* I’m sure many of you have experience with similar kinds of conversations playing out in your head.

In my session I was able to drop into a deep state of relaxation and take a more honest look at the question that was running through my mind. I was able to feel the part of me that could see that I was the perfect person to talk about CST, and could ask myself, *Why not take the opportunity?* Because this was a felt sense in my body and not just an intellectual exercise, it had a lot more power.

I have received CST regularly for more than ten years. There is always something that can be helped and supported in my body. Many times I get off the table and wonder how I coped with life before CST! I’ve benefited from seeing many different CST practitioners, and from each therapist I’ve received helpful work and gained valuable insights. I know that receiving CST is something that supports my having a full and happy life.

### ***Case Study: The Golfer***

The following is a great example of what can be achieved with CST. This client has received no other form of therapy aside from CST since we started having biweekly sessions over a period of 18 months. Although it does work very well with other treatments, this client’s experience shows what CST alone can help accomplish. His story gives a real-life example of the material I presented in this chapter, as well as examples of how change is perceived by a client both on the table and then in daily life. I’ll briefly explain unfamiliar concepts as they come up, but I also encourage you not to worry about understanding every detail, and to just absorb the story. I’ll discuss everything in greater depth as you continue through the book.



One afternoon I received an urgent call from a regular client who was concerned about her husband, Jim, who would be leaving on a 14-hour flight to China in a few days’ time. He had acute right knee pain and was unsure

whether he would be able to walk once he got off the plane. Jim's job required frequent travel, and on a recent return from an international business trip, he had barely been able to disembark. He had already had two arthroscopic surgeries on each of his knees; the last surgery had been only a month ago, on the left one. He was certain that he would need a third surgery on his right knee and was ready to schedule another MRI. Even more than the constant pain, Jim feared losing his ability to play golf, which was his joy and passion in life.

Until this point Jim had been unwilling to try CST because he didn't understand it, even though his wife had received a lot of benefit from it. Although CST has become more common in the last 30 years, it's still not widely known, and many people, like him, have a healthy skepticism. Other than receiving a couple of massages that hadn't been effective in reducing his pain, Jim had never tried any treatment outside of conventional medicine.

For some people it takes reaching a crisis point to be willing to try something that is outside of their "tried and tested" world. Often they've gotten frustrated by the lack of progress they've had in resolving their pain, and they've exhausted all the options they know of. They feel disempowered, and don't know the next step to take. It took reaching this point of desperation for Jim to give CST a go!

Since Jim was due to fly out on Sunday, I put my treatment table in the car and drove to his home on Saturday morning to see if CST could help him have a more comfortable and manageable trip. Once Jim was comfortably on my table, I placed my hands on several locations, starting at his feet, to feel the craniosacral rhythm throughout his body. One of the things the CSR does is let me know how well a body is functioning in terms of its vitality. If I feel a "drag" in the CSR, I know the client doesn't have the full amount of energy that should be available and that the person will be feeling tired and run-down. I didn't feel a decrease in vitality in Jim's CSR, so I knew his system had plenty of energy.

By feeling Jim's CSR, I could also get a better sense of where the primary cause of his pain was. This may seem counterintuitive, but the source of a problem is not necessarily where the pain is! By tuning in, I assessed that my client's knee pain was stemming at least in part from his sacrum, quite a distance away. I could feel where his body was struggling to work well, especially in both knees and in his lower back, more so on the right than the

left. There was very little movement in his sacrum and a decrease in the CSR through his neck and at the base of his skull. Because his head tilted to the left both when he was upright and when he was lying down, I decided to evaluate his *fascia* and noticed a fascial restriction at his right knee and hip that ran through the pelvis and up to the neck.

Fascia is a connective tissue that provides internal support for our bodies, from head to toe and side-to-side, much like a body stocking. You can see fascia very easily on a raw chicken breast; it's the opaque film just under the skin, wrapped around the muscle. Because fascia creates a web to support the whole body, pain in our cheekbone could have its source in the fascia down in the respiratory diaphragm. Imagine an elastic cord that's gotten snagged at one end: the cord would be restricted in how much it could stretch at the point where it got snagged. It could stretch downward from that point on, but in order to be able to lengthen to its full reach again, it must be released from the place it first got caught.

We all have such “fascial snags,” and for the most part, we function just fine. We generally have a good amount of flexibility, so we have many ways to work around our snags. But when a body has too many snags (or one or two big ones), then it runs out of options, our movement is restricted, and we feel pain!

After performing this initial evaluation, I had a good picture of Jim's body and an idea of how treatment would proceed. In this case, the origins of my client's knee pain were in his sacrum and right hip, and his neck was involved, as well. He was really surprised that by placing my hands on a few different places on his body I could tell him where his pain originated. The skepticism that he came in with was becoming curiosity.

As I started to treat his sacrum and lower abdomen, not only did I feel a gradual softening in the tissue under my hands, but Jim became aware of just how tight this area had been. It's not unusual that he hadn't noticed the tension he had been holding in that area. Generally, we're not used to really feeling our bodies. Once an acute pain has subsided a bit, we become used to it, and even though there is still discomfort there, we stop paying attention. During a CST session, we become more aware of sensation in our bodies. To that end, Jim told me that he could feel the pain in his right knee intensify as I worked on his sacrum, and there was a tingling sensation running down his legs and out his feet. I became very excited, as I recognized this tingling as a sign of the nervous system letting go of the fight-or-flight response in



his body.

When we are stressed or feel we're in danger, our sympathetic nervous system mobilizes a huge amount of energy to confront that danger or get away from it. If our bodies are overwhelmed, we also may faint. This can happen in the blink of an eye, before we're even consciously aware of feeling scared. Once the danger has passed, the parasympathetic nervous system allows us to safely relax and get on with our everyday business. Most likely you have felt this in your own body or seen it in an animal, as it starts to tremble once it knows it's safe. This trembling is a discharging of the energy that got mobilized to cope with danger. Once that's finished discharging, the animal moves on, calm and unperturbed.

The tingling that Jim felt going down his legs was a parasympathetic response; his body no longer had to work at containing and holding in that fight-or-flight energy. Unlike with animals, the process of letting go of the fight-or-flight response often does not come naturally to people. It's as if it gets packaged away somewhere in us, taking a lot of energy and effort to keep it stored. One client described it as having put her difficulties in a box with a locked lid, and she didn't want to look in that box. The problem is that our bodies are taxed by the amount of constant effort that's required to keep that fight-or-flight energy packaged away, and it doesn't allow us to fully relax. As we let go and allow the shaking or trembling to happen and then subside on its own, we have more energy available to us, and we can then find a deeper state of relaxation and rejuvenation from which the body can start to heal itself.

Our ability to heal ourselves is one of the tenets of CST. As Dr. John Upledger stated: "The therapist does not heal or cure. The healing is done by the patient using the help and facilitation of the therapist."

Because of the partnership between therapist and client, sessions are most effective when clients are able to track sensation in their bodies, just as Jim did by reporting the tingling sensation in his legs. Often this is the first time clients have really paid attention to sensations in their bodies, and the therapist can help educate the clients in developing this skill. By being willing to be active participants, clients will gain much more from their sessions. And as they continue with craniosacral therapy, they can become extremely perceptive to even subtle changes.

## Results

Jim flew to China the next day, and although his knees were very painful at the end of the flight, he was not immobilized as he had feared. After he returned, he continued with biweekly sessions. After his fourth CST session he was taking two-mile walks daily, his knee pain was much reduced, and he noticed lower back pain only after playing two rounds of golf in the same day! Jim's skepticism disappeared, and he knew that CST was the correct route for taking care of himself.

Over a further 18 months of regular treatments, Jim noticed many positive changes that went well beyond healing his knees. These kinds of life changes often happen when clients deepen their relationships with themselves, which is nearly inevitable with regular therapy. For example, as Jim and I were working through a restriction in the upper part of his rib cage, a memory came back to him of having had pleurisy many years ago. He recalled how scary that had been and how the pain had been so intense, he thought he was having a heart attack.

This would be a frightening experience for anyone, but for Jim it also triggered the memory of his father dying of a heart attack when Jim was nine years old—and interestingly, Jim developed pleurisy when his children were also around nine years old.

As we worked together on his rib cage, the entire area softened and Jim felt more able to take a full, deep breath. He commented that he had always been fearful of having any kind of chest pain, but now that he understood the story behind the fear he could relax more.

This story of pain and synchronicity is a great example of how the energy of life events layers up in the body, gradually demanding attention. For the most part, we experience upsetting events and then continue on with our lives; however, as we continue to ignore uncomfortable emotions and sensations, more layers of life's events build up, and our bodies start to protest. This commonly shows up in the form of pain, lack of energy, and a feeling of anxiety.

I was often drawn to work on the area over Jim's right hip for many of our sessions. Then one day, about a year into our work together, I asked him if he could remember anything about his right hip or leg from childhood. He said he recalled being told that he had been treated for a right hip problem as a baby. He also remembered being treated by a chiropractor because his head was always tilted to the left. These memories had been tucked away for a long time; he did not recall these events during our first session

together, and even his wife of 30 years had not known.

After the session he contacted his aunt, who verified that he had been in a hip brace when he was a baby, though that had not stopped him from being a top high-school athlete and running 50 to 60 miles a week as a young adult. Jim's knee pain first started when he was 30 years old, and he progressively limited his activity over time. It's possible that his head tilt was compensation for what was happening at his right hip, which eventually led, decades later, to knee pain.

Our ability to forget significant life events, and to function despite them for quite some time, can be surprising. I once worked with a woman who experienced constant headaches and had been advised to keep increasing her medication until the headaches were helped by it. Even at her maximum dose she felt little relief, and experienced many unpleasant side effects. At her first session I asked her if she had ever had a concussion, and she responded that she hadn't. But as she arrived at her second appointment, she announced, "You know, I just remembered that I was hit on the head by an ax when I was nine, and was knocked out." It seems like someone would never forget something like that, but we do! After three sessions her headaches had been reduced significantly, and she felt like she finally had gained the relief she'd been seeking.

As Jim and I continued to work together, we discovered that a restriction at the first vertebra in his neck also related to his knee pain. He became very adept at tracking sensation in his body, and was intrigued by the fact he might feel strong sensation in one area of his body when I was working over a different area. This deepening awareness helped him to fine-tune his daily activity levels and know when he needed to take a break.

Jim has made many seemingly spontaneous changes in his lifestyle since he began CST. I believe that he had the ability to follow through with these changes because he was not spending so much energy compensating for the stuck areas in his body. He's gone from drinking two or three diet sodas daily to drinking them only occasionally and has lost 30 pounds by changing his eating habits (which also cut his cholesterol levels by half!). He also significantly cut down his alcohol intake; even as he has been dealing with a lot of challenges at work, for the first time in his life he has not used alcohol to deal with the stressful feelings.

## **The Bottom Line**

Jim's seen a lot of improvements in his life since working with me, but what really sold him on CST is the improvement in his golf game. When he plays golf soon after a treatment, his score is three or four shots lower, so he always likes to book one before tournaments! He is delighted that he can now play two rounds of golf pain-free in the same day.

Jim has developed some good self-care strategies, too. He bought the CD that I play during treatments and now has a Pavlovian response to the music! As soon as he hears the first notes, he can feel his nervous system starting to relax. He plays it when traveling and whenever he has trouble getting to sleep. I also helped him develop a maintenance routine of exercises and stretches for his knee and back, while he continues his golf games and daily walks.

Jim now weighs the same as he did when he was in high school, is able to walk and play golf regularly, and has more balance in his life. He's changed his coping mechanisms significantly. He's committed to the lifestyle changes he's made and has become more interested in the process of making these changes rather than only focusing on getting to the end result. He still does not understand how CST works, but because he continues to get the results he wants, he's now more open to looking at other things he doesn't understand, like his wife's spiritual practice.

Both Jim and his wife receive regular CST sessions, and they've noticed that their relationship has improved since they started seeing me. It's given them a shared experience to talk about together and has facilitated a deeper level of connection. Their conversations now are long and wide-ranging, whereas before they were more focused on things that needed to get done. They've also started sharing more activities, such as taking walks and playing golf together.

Again, these kinds of shifts are possible when we no longer have to work so hard at holding restrictions in our bodies and we become more comfortable with feeling different emotions and their accompanying sensations. This is one of the wonders of CST: what is possible when we have a greater amount of life force available to us. Solutions arise with ease and little analysis. Once we come to a place of balance in our nervous system, we have access to our natural vitality.



I hope you appreciate Jim's case, as it illustrates some of the basic

concepts of CST and highlights how CST can help with addressing physical pain and support life shifts through energetic change. Since the integration of academic knowledge with intuitive information is something that keeps me excited about this work, in the next chapter I'll go into greater depth about the “nuts and bolts” of CST.



## *Chapter Two*

### **CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY IN DEPTH**

In this chapter I present a therapist's view of craniosacral therapy. You'll read about how I learned the work and the mechanics of the physical techniques I use, as well as the expansion of my awareness and the fine-tuning of my sensitivity. Taking you through the process I went through will show you the depth of training that is required to become a competent craniosacral therapist. You'll also gain a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how CST works. By having this background knowledge, you will have a better sense of how this therapy can help you.

At times I present some detailed anatomy, which you don't necessarily need to memorize in order to receive an effective session. You can skim these parts if you like, but I've found that many people enjoy learning more about how their bodies work. To that end, during therapy sessions I often retrieve my model skull so clients can see the structures we've worked on. I may also show pictures from my collection of anatomy books, to give a better sense of a particular structure or system. As we discussed, it's best to be an active recipient in CST, and having a picture in your mind's eye of what your body wants to work on can speed up the process of healing.

#### ***A Brief History of Craniosacral Therapy***

The roots of craniosacral therapy are in osteopathy, a branch of medicine. In the United States, a doctor of osteopathy (D.O.) practices in the same capacity that a medical doctor (M.D.) does, but has additional training in osteopathic manipulative techniques. In the 1800s A.T. Still, known as the father of osteopathy, created a new perspective of the human body by combining hands-on healing techniques found in cultures around the world

with engineering principles. He saw the body as an integrated whole rather than a collection of parts and believed that the body, when given proper support, would heal itself. He is quoted as saying, “The mechanical principles on which osteopathy is based are as old as the universe.”

One of Still’s star students was Dr. William Sutherland, who became particularly intrigued by the cranium and its influence on the nervous system. He experimented with a helmet fitted with screws to apply pressure on his own cranial bones, and noted various symptoms related to different areas of compression. He determined that cranial bones did, in fact, move, and developed techniques to allow motion to come back to cranial bones that were stuck, thereby normalizing function. Sutherland continued to study the nature of the craniosacral system for the next 50 years, and the subtleties he worked with became a kind of spiritual path for him. He called his work “osteopathy in the cranial field,” which developed into what is now commonly known as cranial osteopathy. Students of his founded the Osteopathic Cranial Academy, which continues to teach his work today.

Although craniosacral therapy is inspired by the work of Drs. Still and Sutherland, its practice is very different from what an osteopath or a cranial osteopath offers. As I mentioned previously, CST was founded by Dr. John Upledger, who graduated from osteopathic medical school. However, he didn’t become interested in the craniosacral system until 1972, when he was assisting a surgeon who was removing plaque from a patient’s *dura mater* (the sheath that surrounds the spinal cord). Dr. Upledger’s job was to hold the *dura mater* still, but he couldn’t because it exhibited a unique rhythmic pulsation. This inspired him to study cranial osteopathy and research the craniosacral rhythm, which led to the development of CST, his lifelong passion.

Dr. Upledger joined the biomechanics research department at Michigan State University in 1975 and did much research proving the existence of the craniosacral system. He worked closely with a physicist to measure the changes taking place in his patients as he worked. This process helped him identify and articulate what he was responding to as he worked with his patients. He coined the phrase *craniosacral therapy* and developed a method of training practitioners, creating the curriculum that is taught at the Upledger Institute today.

One of the many innovations credited to Dr. Upledger is his focus on normalizing tension in the membranes attached to the cranial bones. There

are vertical and horizontal membranes running through the brain, providing the brain with some structural support. Since these membranes are made of fascia, and connect with the fascia of the body (that body stocking of connective tissue I mentioned in the last chapter), Upledger CST is a whole-body therapy.



I knew as soon as I took my first class with Dr. Upledger (or Dr. John, as he preferred to be called) that he had no qualms about speaking his mind. And with the difficult path he chose as he developed CST, it's clear that he needed that characteristic! For example, during his time at Michigan State, he worked regularly at a school with a high population of children with autism. He found that the children responded well to his therapy, but required ongoing treatment to maintain their results. Therefore, he made the controversial decision to teach the school staff how to do the work. His fellow osteopaths gave him a lot of flak for extending training to people not in the medical field, but Dr. John knew that with competent instruction, laypeople could use the techniques he'd developed safely and effectively.

Few masters of their craft can teach others to do their work well, and I'm grateful that Dr. John was committed to ensuring that competent CST training was available to the most people possible. It was inspiring to watch the master in action as he demonstrated CST, combining his highly attuned intuition with his in-depth knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the human body.

Dr. John believed that to do CST effectively, practitioners need:

—Thorough knowledge of anatomy and physiology, so therapists can be detailed, precise, and appropriate with their palpation and pressure. (Anatomy and physiology is thoroughly addressed in classes within the Upledger Institute curriculum.)

—An open heart and good therapeutic intent. It is a lifelong process to refine the art of staying in a grounded, neutral, nonjudgmental, and open place with our clients.

—The ability to follow their hands. I describe this as my hands “listening” to the tissues. My hands move in response to the tissue movements underneath them. I'm not making a decision to go to any particular place, but instead I work from the premise that my client's body



knows how to heal itself, and my role is to follow its direction and provide support.

—To know their limits. As practitioners, it's important to have a sense of our own boundaries and to willingly refer clients to other professionals when appropriate. It is also vital for us to continue to receive our own CST treatments in order to keep our bodies and minds healthy and to keep growing as practitioners.

## ***Feeling the Craniosacral Rhythm***

My physical therapy training had been based in medical science, with an emphasis on using studies to prove effectiveness of treatment. I enjoyed it and continue to be excited by new research, but my training had not encouraged me to explore the benefits of incorporating the right, intuitive side of my brain in my work.

When I took my first CST class, I had no difficulty with the detailed anatomy and physiology being presented. However, I was really challenged when it came to letting my guard down and suspending my left, analytical brain so that I could get into a relaxed space to feel the subtleties of the craniosacral system. I knew that I would have to work on developing this area—craniosacral therapists are encouraged to use both the left and right sides of their brains to help clients, embracing all aspects of their brains' skills and functions.

I was delighted when, on the second day, I first felt the movement of the craniosacral rhythm. I spent a lot of time in class getting familiar with it. Initially, my brow was furrowed and my face was tense, but once I felt the rhythm I was in a state of open wonder and relief. Now I get such joy watching people's faces when they first feel the CSR. (You too can learn how to feel this rhythm, and I will take you through the process in detail in the last chapter.)

The craniosacral rhythm can be felt anywhere in the body. It requires a very light, relaxed touch of about five grams of pressure, which is nearly the weight of a nickel. This is very different from the palpation skill that is usually used in manual therapies, where there is deep probing into tissue and joints. Instead of quickly sinking my hands into the tissue to feel what was going on, I had to learn to allow the CSR to come to my hands. In doing so, I could feel a subtle motion of all the skin, tissue, and bones under my

hands rolling outward (known as the external rotation, or *flexion*, in CST terminology). This was followed by a slight pause, then a rolling in (known as the internal rotation, or *extension*).

If you're like me, and the analytical side of your brain likes to keep busy, it may help you to form a mental picture of the system that creates this rhythm. We'll start with the structure of the cranium.

The bulk of our cranium is made up of seven bones: the *occiput* at the back of the head, two parietal bones on top, two temporal bones at the sides, the frontal bone at the front, and the *sphenoid* bone behind our eyes with its two wings at our temples. In class, we learned that the adult cranium is not a single fused mass of bones, as the British and American anatomical textbooks taught (and still teach today). The places where the cranial bones connect to one another are called *sutures*, and not only do they allow for microscopic movement to accommodate changes in fluid pressure, they are constantly changing in response to alterations in the internal environment of the body.

A system of fascial membranes lines the cranial bones and also runs vertically and horizontally inside the cranium, separating the brain into four quadrants and providing structure and support. The membranes running vertically are called the *falx cerebri* and *falx cerebelli*. The horizontal membrane is the *tentorium cerebelli*, with its superior and inferior (upper and lower) leaves. This membrane system exits the cranium through a hole below the brain stem called the *foramen magnum*, forming a protective sheath for the spinal cord and connecting with the rest of the body's extensive fascial network.

The brain and spinal cord are bathed in about 150 milliliters of cerebrospinal fluid, a clear, plasma-like fluid extracted from the blood. Its physical makeup is equivalent to fresh river water, while the makeup of the rest of the fluid in the body is saline, like the ocean. In fact, we have the same proportion of "river water" to "salt water" in our bodies that the earth does: 3 percent river water to 97 percent salt water.

The cerebrospinal fluid is encased by the fascial membrane system I described above, which collectively is called the *meninges*. The *dura mater*, which is Latin for "tough mother," is the outermost membrane of the system and provides a durable, watertight sheath. Inside the *dura mater* are two membranes that closely cover the brain and spinal cord, the *arachnoid* layer and *pia mater*. Cerebrospinal fluid enables our brain to float in the

head and our spinal cord to move freely down our spines, providing a cushioning effect as well as bringing in nutrients and clearing away waste from the nervous system.

The craniosacral system's rhythmic activity is derived from the movement of the cerebrospinal fluid, just as the cardiac pulse derives its movement from the circulation of blood. To explain how this rhythm is created, Dr. John developed the pressurestat model: when pressure in the head reaches an upper threshold, nerves between cranial bones, known as stretch receptors, send a signal to stop cerebrospinal fluid production. This fluid is always draining from the system, so when production stops, the pressure drops. When pressure reaches a lower threshold, receptors signal the need to start producing the fluid again.

It may help to imagine a bathtub with a leaky plug. You want the water to stay at a comfortable depth, but the plug is leaking and a constant trickle of water is going down the drain. Whenever you see the water level drop, you turn on the tap until the water is back to where you want it. This is the basic process that creates the CSR.



There's a lot of information to gain by feeling someone's craniosacral rhythm. As a therapist, I can assess the range, or amplitude, of a person's rhythm by noticing the flexion and extension of the CSR (how far it rolls out and in). By placing both hands symmetrically on the left and right sides of the body at the feet, thighs, pelvis, rib cage, shoulders, and skull, I can get an overall impression of well-being and where any difficulties are in a client's body.

I can also compare symmetry on the left and right sides of the body to help pinpoint difficulties. For instance, if there is half the range of motion of the CSR at the right ankle compared to the left, then I know that there is a problem with the function of the right ankle. I also note the quality of the rhythm overall, as this gives an impression of the person's sense of well-being and energy.

As my palpation skills have deepened, I've become able to feel more subtle information and refine my locating skills. While in my early days I may have noticed a restriction on the left side of the pelvis, I can now hone in on its precise location, for example the left psoas muscle or the head of the left thigh bone. This has allowed me to work more precisely and

efficiently.

It is important to keep an open mind and trust my palpation skills when meeting each new client. Clients share some of their history with me before I feel their CSR, and they often have theories about what is wrong. If I do not remain open and neutral, this may lead me to think that I already know where restrictions will be. However, it is important to challenge any assumptions my client or I may have, so I do not miss the true source of the problem. Therapists must set aside a client's history as much as possible during a CST session and pay full attention to what the body is saying—the CSR helps us do that.

### ***The Ten-Step Protocol for the Whole Body***

Feeling the craniosacral rhythm is the first of three CST evaluation techniques. Before we go into detail about the other two techniques, fascial glide and arcing, I'd like to discuss the two *ten-step protocols* used at the Upledger Institute to familiarize therapists with the tools and concepts of CST.

Students at the Institute begin by learning a whole-body, ten-step protocol of treatment. They start by using the CSR to assess the body, then gently open up the tissue at the sacrum and pelvis, the respiratory diaphragm at the rib cage, the thoracic inlet at the collarbones, the throat, and the base of the neck. At each of these five places, therapists will put one hand on the front of the body, and the other on the back of the body. (For example, at the pelvis, one hand is under the sacrum and the other hand is placed over the lower abdomen, directly above the sacrum.) Once his or her hands connect, or blend and meld, with the tissue there, the therapist then allows them to follow any movement that is felt, trusting the body's *inner wisdom* to guide what needs to happen to create ease. Blending and melding is a way of touching a person with the least amount of intrusion possible, while the therapist allows, trusts, and accepts the information that comes into his or her hands. The protocol dictates very specific techniques to create space between the first vertebra and the cranium, and a precise order for opening up restrictions between the cranial bones, releasing tension in the mandible (jawbone), and mobilizing the dura mater from the sacrum all the way to the cranium.

The protocol also includes the concept of the *still point*. This is the act of intentionally bringing the CSR to a therapeutic stop. While therapists follow