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Alternative Medicine

## A light touch can ease pain in the head, neck and spine

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When migraines strike or other chronic pain develops, some people get relief through medication.

But others, who find traditional medicine can't help, are turning to various forms of alternative medicine. One with a rapidly growing group of adherents is craniosacral therapy.



BY DAVID R. LUTMAN, SPECIAL TO THE COURIER-JOURNAL

**CST patients range from people who have been in car accidents, suffered head injuries or have chronic headaches.**

Using a soft touch, generally no greater than 5 grams, about the weight of a nickel, practitioners try to detect areas where tissue is compressed and release restrictions in the flow of cerebrospinal fluid, which bathes the brain and spinal cord.

The light touches of the fingers to the head, neck and spine are supposed to decompress the parasympathetic nervous system, the part of the nervous system that slows the heart rate and increases intestinal and gland activity. The goal is to help the body's natural healing process.

"There is nothing invasive. It's all touch work," said Judy Clark Ilari of Middletown, who has been going to a local craniosacral therapist Anne Linden Steele for several years. Ilari said three back surgeries and post-surgery pain prompted her first visit.

"Pain and discomfort takes us to places we would not have gone," she said. "I was skeptical, but I was helped."

Steele said her clients have been in car accidents, suffered head injuries or, like Ilari, have been dogged by post-surgery complications and pain. Some have chronic headaches as Steele did before she received craniosacral therapy, or

CST. It inspired her to become a practitioner.

Some recipients of CST are people seeking an alternative to taking drugs because they can't or won't use medications. Others are children with disorders such as autism, cerebral palsy and juvenile migraines.

While Steele conducts an hour-long therapy session, the client remains clothed and lies face up on a massage table. Steele said she feels for ripples or waves of cerebrospinal fluid and tries to detect "dead spots" that indicate compressed tissues and blockages.

If compressed tissues are eased, the client may feel a zing or ripple, she said, but others say they just feel less pressure.

It's not atypical to leave the session with no sense of improvement, but wake up the next morning with relief from pain, Steele said. The most frequent response of her clients is deep relaxation, she said.

John Upledger, an osteopath based in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., is the founder of this form of nontraditional medicine, which is rapidly gaining followers.

While assisting in a spinal operation in the 1970s, Upledger has said he was startled to see a strong pulse in the membranes surrounding the patient's spinal cord. He said he determined the pulse was coming from the cerebrospinal fluid and came to believe that anything that blocked its flow could cause physical and mental distress.

So he developed a technique for applying light resistance to parts of the body, including the bones of the skull, which he thinks remain mobile through life. This is a point that many medical doctors dispute. One of them is Dr. Stephen Barrett, an outspoken critic of alternative treatments who maintains a Web site, [www.quackwatch.com](http://www.quackwatch.com). He said the bones in the skull fuse during infancy and cerebrospinal fluid doesn't have a palpable rhythm.

But some physicians and traditional therapists are supportive of craniosacral therapy. It was an occupational therapist who suggested Rachel Tugon, of Louisville, take her youngest daughter, then 16 months old, to Steele. The child was born with a genetic disorder, Prader Willi Syndrome, that is associated with dysfunction of the hypothalamus in the brain. Children with this disorder are developmentally delayed in infancy.

Tugon's daughter, Erin, had not been able to crawl despite traditional therapy, but two weeks after craniosacral therapy she was crawling, much to the delight of her parents and the medical professionals treating her. In the third week, she

pulled herself up to a standing position. At the same time, she experienced "an explosion of language."

"You can argue that it may have happened anyway," her mother said, "but my instinct is that craniosacral therapy laid the foundation" for progress.

Tugon said that the craniosacral therapy has continued for the last six years and that, despite having a syndrome that often results in children being extremely obese and developmentally disabled, Erin, now 7, has an IQ of 105 and has maintained a normal weight.

Dr. Wendy Daly, Erin's pediatrician, said she thinks craniosacral therapy, which she first learned about through a massage therapist 10 years, is a way to help Erin's body "heal itself."

"I'm very open and accepting of such alternative therapies. I think they are an adjunct to what I do traditionally," Daly said.

Last September and again last week, the Upledger Institute was in the news when it treated Egyptian twins, joined across the top of their heads, with craniosacral therapy. One of the twins was eating and digesting for both, but after five days of craniosacral therapy, therapists relieved pressure on compressed nerves and the other twin's body started functioning more fully.

A Texas physician announced last week that he and a surgical team plan to attempt to separate the twins in three to four months. The twins turn 2 in June.

Although used to treat a wide variety of conditions, craniosacral therapy isn't appropriate for some people. The Upledger Institute recommends that anyone with an acute aneurysm, cerebral hemorrhage or pre-existing severe bleeding disorder not use craniosacral therapy.

Although some hospitals and treatment centers for the disabled offer programs on craniosacral therapy, health insurance doesn't cover it. An hour session with Steele runs \$45 for middle-school age or younger and \$60 for an adult, but fees are higher in bigger markets.

For a list of craniosacral therapy practitioners in Kentucky, go to [www.theinstitute.org/practitioners/kentucky.shtml#craniosacral](http://www.theinstitute.org/practitioners/kentucky.shtml#craniosacral).

For Indiana, go to [www.theinstitute.org/practitioners/indiana.shtml#craniosacral](http://www.theinstitute.org/practitioners/indiana.shtml#craniosacral).

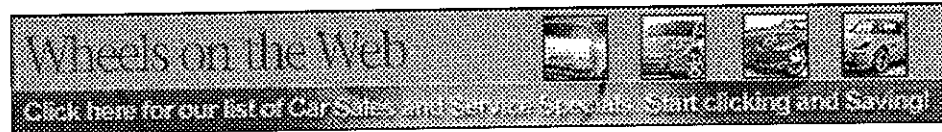
For more information about craniosacral therapy: [www.upledger.com](http://www.upledger.com), or call the

Upledger Institute at (800) 233-5880. The institute also can tell you whether a therapist has taken its course work and earned certification.

The Upledger Institute says it has trained about 50,000 practitioners worldwide.

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