

Birth Injury Guide (Online)

Craniosacral Therapy for Infants

Craniosacral therapy (CST) is a relatively new treatment that can be applied to infants who've experienced head trauma and injuries. It's often used for infants who underwent a difficult delivery which resulted in birth injuries, but it's also effective for an array of other common problems that babies may experience, including nursing and feeding problems, colic, teething issues, and more.

About Craniosacral Therapy

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), CST involves massaging and touching the the bones around the skull in order to minimize pain, promote growth, and help babies recover from birth trauma. It helps by relieving the pressure and tensions in the baby's body. Physicians and therapists who specialize in CST state that there is a link between the lower part of the back to the fluids in the head. Since these two areas are connected, they control a lot of the body's actions. With CST, these areas can be massaged to reduce blockage and normalize the body.

CST is also believed to relieve headaches, eye problems, hyperactivity, jaw issues, lack of coordination, and more. For adults, ACS suggests that it's a good form of therapy for cancer patients.

Why Infants Have Cranial Injuries

During birth, infants' skulls change to fit through the mother's pelvis. The cranium bones may override each other in order to accommodate the birth process. Known as compression/decompression, it's a normal process, and the bones usually go in back in place naturally. However, in some instances, especially if an infant is pulled too harshly, unnatural damages may occur to the bones, and in turn they may fail to heal properly. As a result, it can lead to a host of problems, such as motor impairment, breathing problems, digestive issues, and more.

Infants who are delivered via C-section may also be at risk for cranial injuries. In fact, studies suggests that babies born via C-section have more abnormal craniosacral evaluations when compared to infants born via traditional delivery. This may be in part due to the C-section experience being more abrupt. In addition, when babies are delivered via C-section, they don't go through the normal process of the cranial compression/decompression, which can result in skull constrictions.

How CST Helps Infants

Feeding Issues

Infants who cannot or are unwilling to nurse can greatly benefit from CST. However, before starting therapy, a complete evaluation by the baby's pediatrician needs to be carried out determine what's causing the feeding problem. Common issues are problems that arise due to

birth injuries, congenital issues, neurological problems, an/or after effects of drugs used before the infant's birth.

In some cases, an infant could have been fed artificially with tubes or other means that created an aversion to feeding. It's important to look into all aspects of the baby's health when looking for the cause of breastfeeding problems.

If none of the aforementioned problems are relevant to your baby, then trauma surrounding the birth may be the cause. Birth trauma can easily cause damage to the baby's head or spine. As mentioned earlier, a difficult traditional birth, a C-section birth, the use of a vacuum extractor or forceps, being delivered in the breech position, or an infant with an unusually large head are common reasons to indicate that birth trauma has occurred. These kinds of injuries during birth can result in pressure being placed on cranial nerves, particularly the nerves that control the mouth.

CST can also be beneficial for babies who do not open their mouth up enough to properly latch on during feeding. When this occurs, it may be possible to help by asking a physician or therapist about proper positioning during feeding to help the baby latch on. However, if proper techniques do not remedy the problem, CST may be beneficial.

"Craniosacral therapy eases the tightness in the baby's mouth, head and neck, leading to breastfeeding success. Birth also effects the alignment of the baby's head and body. CST aligns the body structurally and gets all the systems working properly — eating, pooping, sleeping," says CST therapist, Barbara Coon, LMT.

Cranial Issues

As mentioned earlier, infants may experience injuries that fail to heal, especially during a traumatic delivery. However, studies suggest that if the infants who get CST, especially during the first weeks of life, have a good chance of the treatment being effective in healing misplaced cranial bones.

Other conditions that CST can help treat include:

Vomiting

Seizures

Fine motor skills problems

Torticollis

Cerebral palsy

Down's Syndrome

ADD or ADHD

Erb's palsy

Colic

Klumpke's palsy

Reflux

Constipation

Teething problems

Acid reflux

Misshapen head

Ear pain

What Happens in a Typical CST Session?

In a typical pediatric CST session, infants are generally placed on massage table, in the therapist's lap, or in the parent's lap. The goal is to first ensure that baby is as comfortable as possible. Afterwards, the treatment portion of the session typically consists of hand-on, rhythmic massages across the baby's skull, jaw, mouth area, and temples.

According to RN Colette Crawford, founder of the Seattle Holistic Center, CST sessions generally make babies at ease, which in turn, comforts the mother. So in essences, in many cases, both mom and baby are being treated at the same time.

"I'll put one hand under the back skull and one hand under the sacrum, and I'm just holding the baby's "handles" (where the spinal membrane attaches to the bone) and we see the baby relax. Now the mother is relaxed, too; I'm treating the baby and the mother is treated, too," said Crawford. "Often it's the mother or the father that needs treatment; the baby is just fine."

The massaging tends to be light; it will generally never cause any pain to the infant as no manipulation is ever used. Typical sessions last anywhere from a half-hour to an hour, depending upon the therapist and the issues the baby is having.

What Happens After a CST Session?

Many infants will sleep for quite a while after a session, which is normal. Sometimes, infants may smile more often, and in turn, may also cry more often after a session, which is also considered normal. This usually subsides within a few days.

Are There Any Complications Associated with CST?

Some studies have suggested that CST may make matters worse for infants who have brain damage. However, there is not enough current information to indicate how accurate this may be. Additionally, some experts feel that infants should not undergo CST at all, and suggest that patients be at least two years of age before starting treatment. Again, more research is needed

to determine if this is a valid claim. If you have any questions, however, it's important to consult with your physician beforehand.

<http://www.birthinjuryguide.org/birth-injury/treatment/craniosacral-therapy/>