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## CranioSacral therapy targets nerves

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**STORYCHAT**  Post Comment

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Editor's note: This is the first in a monthly series on "complementary therapies." Watch for future stories on topics such as detoxing the body, nutrition and energy medicine.

Squirming on her mother's lap, 5-year-old Azaria Baker notices every new person who enters the waiting room at Meridian Center for Wellness in Visalia.

She makes eye contact with them, often smiling or making a sound with her tongue vibrating against her lips — the only sound she can make.

Azaria can't speak because she was born with a rare brain defect, Aicardia syndrome, which causes her to have frequent seizures. Her parents, TJ and Debi Baker, bring her to Meridian twice a month for the gentle 45- to 55-minute body-work sessions known as CranioSacral therapy. The Bakers say the therapy has helped their daughter to be more aware, alert and calm.

"It seems the seizures increase if we skip a session," TJ Baker said, also noting the therapy has helped his daughter stop grinding her teeth.

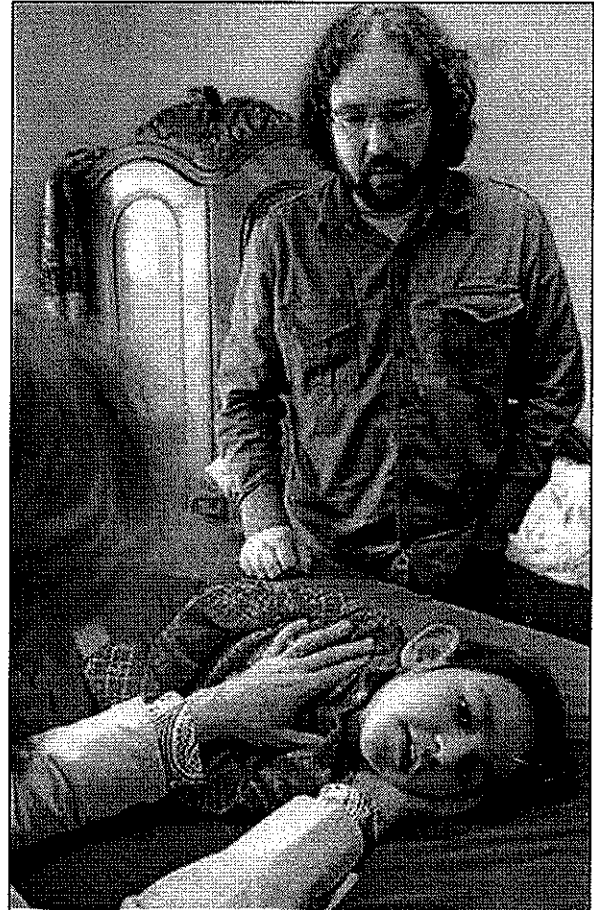
The therapist, Carol McClellan, ushers the Bakers into the small therapy room which used to be a bedroom in the old home on Center Avenue that Meridian now occupies.

Debi Baker lays her fully clothed daughter, pacifier in mouth, face-up on the massage table. McClellan talks softly to Azaria and Azaria looks into McClellan's eyes.

Using only five grams of pressure — about the weight of a nickel — McClellan places her hands gently on Azaria's head, feeling for the pulsating rhythm of the soft tissues and fluid that protect the girl's brain and spinal cord, along with the movement of the bones that make up her skull.

"I'm tuning in to how the cranial bones are moving with the cranial rhythm," the therapist said.

That statement might have been met with derision a few decades ago, McClellan said, because everyone used to believe the cranial bones were fixed. But, the whole basis of CranioSacral therapy is that they do move, as discovered by osteopathic physician William Sutherland in the first half of the 20th century. And, according to the research, the tissue that



### ON THE NET

Find a qualified CranioSacral therapist or more details on the therapy at [www.upledger.com](http://www.upledger.com).

### HOW TO ATTEND

- What: Free CranioSacral therapy and acupuncture clinic
- When: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Feb. 2
- Where: Meridian Center for Wellness, 1105 W. Center Ave., Visalia
- Information: Call 636-6430 to schedule an appointment

surrounds them can become tense or pulled and affect the rest of the body — and even the mind and emotions — through the autonomic nervous system.

Another osteopathic physician, John Upledger, took Sutherland's research and ran with it, setting up a team at Michigan State University in 1975 to research the cranial-sacral system, which extends from the skull to the tailbone. As a result of that research, Upledger developed CranioSacral therapy.

Since 1985, the Upledger Institute in Florida has trained more than 80,000 therapists worldwide. McClellan, with 19 years experience, is one of the institute's instructors and travels around the country and the world teaching classes when she is not giving therapy sessions to individuals at Meridian.

The therapy is a post-grad course to other modalities, McClellan said. The institute typically trains naturopathic physicians, chiropractors, physical therapists, massage therapists, nurses, dentists and midwives. Medical doctors take the classes, too, though they don't usually have time to give a patient a full session, so they often refer their patients to therapists, she said.

She also teaches the therapy to parents who want to be able to work on their children between sessions with a professional. TJ has taken that class, along with Debi, who, as a certified massage therapist, has also taken the beginning class in the series of instruction for professionals. Debi says she doesn't want to stop there.

"I will continue learning CranioSacral therapy," she said. "I want to do this to help other people. Seeing how much this has helped Azaria has pulled me in that direction."

As McClellan continues to work on Azaria, she repositions her hands from time to time, gently pressing on different points on her young client's head, spine or lower back. Less than halfway through the session, Azaria decides she wants to roll over onto her left side and does so — with a little help from her mom and the therapist.

McClellan moves to the other side of the table to accommodate Azaria's comfort.

"This therapy is very non-invasive," McClellan said. "I'm just helping her body to help itself."

By the end of the 45-minute session, Azaria is asleep.

"This is the way it usually ends," her mother said, as TJ carried their sleeping daughter out.

The challenges McClellan most often sees in her clients are

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### FREE RESOURCES

Dr. Steven Mitchell, a local wellness professional and chiropractor, announced he is available to deliver free safety talks for local businesses and organization.

Mitchell recently joined Foundation for Wellness Professionals, a nonprofit group dedicated to health and wellness. As an active member, Mitchell is required to deliver safety talks on topics ranging from back safety to weight loss and fibromyalgia. These lectures are designed to reduce work-related injuries and enhance the general health and well being of employees.

Because the foundation is a non-profit group, the lectures are free.

Information: 685-9391 or  
[www.doctorsspeakersbureau.com](http://www.doctorsspeakersbureau.com).

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tension or migraine headaches, anxiety and anything else stress related, including respiratory stress.

There are many people in the Valley who need help, and, fortunately, there are several qualified CranioSacral therapists in the Visalia area, she said.

One of the other CranioSacral businesses in Visalia is Living Well: A Healing Oasis, which has three therapists.

One of Living Well's CranioSacral therapists, Luann Hickey, works on cats and dogs as well as humans. Owners bring their pets to Hickey for a variety of reasons, and Hickey says the creatures are good subjects.

"It's beautiful," she said. "They respond much like humans. They will release [tension] almost immediately and fall into that trance-like state."

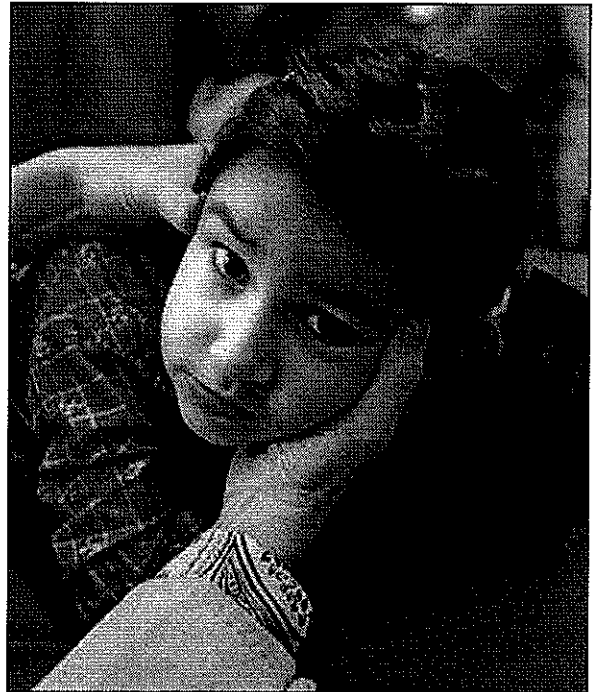
Visalia vocalist Pam Clark, 54, is another believer in CranioSacral therapy. After suffering two strokes within 10 months in 2002, she was left with her right hand completely paralyzed and doctors telling her she would not regain her speech.

"I couldn't make a sound," she said. "When I was told there was no hope I would ever speak again, it was a death sentence to me, because I made my living teaching voice."

Clark had CranioSacral sessions followed by acupuncture treatments at Meridian twice a week after that. Very soon, she said, she could say all the vowels, and it wasn't much longer until she could say almost every letter in the alphabet. By 2006, Clark was singing in church again, and the only remaining problem with her hand was a slight weakness.

She hasn't resumed teaching voice lessons yet.

"But, I'm just about ready," Clark said.



#### WELLNESS CENTER OFFERS FREE CLINIC

Long-time CranioSacral therapist Carol McClellan of the Meridian Center for Wellness in Visalia believes so strongly in the benefits of the therapy that she wants anyone in need to be able to try it free of charge.

To make that happen, she is in the process of setting up a foundation so that children and others who are in need of therapy but can't afford it can get it free of charge. The fledgling foundation, which is called the Yaretzi Rose Holistic Educational Foundation for Families, will have its first free clinic from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 2. The clinic will focus on families with children, but anyone is welcome to attend.

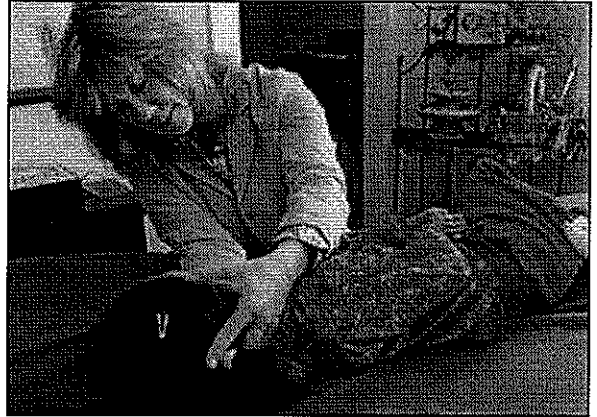
"We have so many children we want to be able to work on without cost restrictions for the families," McClellan said. "So many people are having challenges with [getting health] insurance."

Sessions may include acupuncture in addition to CranioSacral therapy, depending on the needs of the person, she said.

McClellan recommends that those interested in attending the free clinic call Meridian for an appointment.

Information: 636-6430.

⊕ Zoom Photo



Photos by Teresa Douglass

CranioSacral therapist Carol McClellan massages Azaria Baker, 5, as Azaria's father, T.J. Baker, top, looks on at the Meridian Center for Wellness in Visalia. Azaria suffers from Aicardia syndrome.