

H. M. Truog Oct 1, 2020 7 min read

# The Benefits of Cranio-Sacral Therapy in Women's Health

Updated: Sep 26, 2021

## **AN INTERVIEW WITH HEATHER HINZ, MS OTR/L, CST-T**

Heather Hinz, MS OTR/L, CST-T, is passionate about supporting clients from a holistic, integrative approach. In 2002, she earned her MS in Occupational Therapy and then worked for more than a decade in acute care, where she specialized in treating patients with neurological impairments such as stroke, traumatic brain injury, and spinal cord injury. In 2005 Heather completed the first of many continuing education classes in Craniosacral Therapy (CST) and discovered her professional passion and purpose.

She has since become a Certified Craniosacral Therapist and continues to refine her manual therapy skills through continued CST training that focus on Women's Health, Conception, Pregnancy and Birth, and Pediatrics, as well as training specific to Visceral Manipulation, Neuromeningeal Manipulation, Lymphatic Drainage, Glial/Brain techniques, and Bioenergetic techniques. She has also recently become a Certified Spiral Practitioner.

When Heather is not enjoying client interactions, she can often be found having dance parties in the kitchen with her two kids, sipping re-heated coffee, gardening, hiking, and stealing moments of quiet time on the front porch swing.

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In this interview, Heather shares her expertise and clinical insight into how she uses CST as a holistic approach to treatment intervention, and how it has the potential to be so beneficial to the practice area of women's health.

### For those who are not familiar, what exactly is Cranio-Sacral Therapy (CST)?

Craniosacral Therapy (CST) is a gently facilitated form of light-touch that allows the practitioner to identify and support the release of tension patterns within a person's physical body structures. These body structures can include the muscle, tendon, bone, connective fascial tissue, the visceral organs, and extend throughout the branches of the nervous system. Craniosacral practitioners are able to identify areas of tension or restriction within these structures by assessing what is known as the craniosacral rhythm (CSR). This rhythm is an innate

pulse-like rhythm that is created by the circulation of cerebrospinal fluid within the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. In areas of physical restriction, there is a limited or complete lack of craniosacral rhythm.

Once patterns of restriction are identified, the practitioner provides support with just enough force — often five grams of pressure, or less — to allow the client to unwind and work through these patterns of tension and help the body come into equilibrium. This equilibrium happens as the nervous system is supported to reduce the sympathetic activation of the *fight-flight-freeze* response, while also promoting the activation of the parasympathetic state of the nervous system that is responsible for rest, digest, and relaxation. This aspect of craniosacral therapy very much happens at a physical level, but craniosacral offers a much broader, subtle, and profound level of support that goes beyond the physical.

While people often initially find their way to a CST practitioner to address physical issues such as pain or decreased physical function, they often find themselves returning for the *emotional* aspects of healing that can take place in a CST session. In this busy world that has various levels of stress and distraction, going inward with a sense of safety and ease can be challenging. For anyone who has experienced any level of trauma, feeling safe in the sensations of the body can be even more difficult. A trusted practitioner is able to support the client in creating the safety and space necessary to look inward, feel the sensations and messages of the body, and become curious at the ways the physical and emotional overlap.

By helping clients create this emotional safety, the physical tissues that have held pain, tension, anxiety, or unconscious memory of previous life experience have an opportunity to be held, heard, and supported to release in deeper and more profound ways. This then translates to the nervous system having further relaxation, which creates further emotional safety. This creates a positive feedback loop that allows for further understanding and shift of emotions, patterns, and experiences that have both physical and emotional components and leads to a deeper connection to self-awareness and ways of resourcing self-support.

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## How is this specialized method of practice beneficial to the area of women's health?

I see female clients for issues related to pelvic floor tension and pain, limited or distorted sensation in the pelvic bowl, and nerve tension and pain in the sciatic and lumbosacral regions. I also support women who are struggling to conceive, those who are pregnant who may experience challenges with connection to self and baby due to previous trauma, and those who have issues with alignment and pain during pregnancy and postpartum. I also have a trauma-informed background and find many women I meet in my practice have experienced some type of trauma—sexual and emotional—who are living with PTSD as a result.

CST is so greatly beneficial in women's health for several reasons: It is gentle and non-invasive as it supports the release of physical and emotional patterns without causing re-traumatization. For women who are wanting to conceive, CST helps support the physical alignment of the sacrum, uterus, fallopian tubes, *etc.*, and helps the client identify any unconscious emotional and energetic beliefs that may create barriers to conscious conception.

It also supports the nervous system in moving from high alert to a calmer, more flexible state, which can be beneficial for those who are wanting to conceive.

For those who are pregnant, maintaining optimal alignment of the skeletal system, as well as supporting the release of any tension patterns that are exacerbated as ligaments and other internal support structures shift, can be vital to improving comfort and well-being in a time of rapid change, even through and beyond the birth process. CST also supports the growing fetus and can support and improve the connection between mama and baby while in utero and beyond. It also can help the overall relationship with women who want to feel safe, embodied, and more fully connected with their sexuality and desire.

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**Many different types of healthcare professionals and complementary practitioners are utilizing CST techniques in their treatment strategies; how do you think CST adds value specifically to the field of occupational therapy?**

I find that CST and OT marry beautifully as both have a holistic approach to well-being and function. As a holistic healthcare professional, I am able to see the big picture with the client's needs, and we are able to have a formal goal-directed intervention plan going forward with care. I recommend a lot of 'home programs' for my clients that focus on self-awareness, alignment, relaxation, and self-regulation. This work is more than just something I am 'doing' to them, but rather, an approach to intervention where I am guiding them in their ability to do for themselves.

I work with a neurologist who loves sending me his clients who present with neurological issues but, upon assessment, present with patterns that are more deeply connected to PTSD than with a specific neurological diagnosis. Working with PTSD is an area of care that OTs are already intimately familiar with across multiple areas of practice. I also get a number of referrals, from counselors, for individuals with severe anxiety and/or depression who have stalled in traditional therapy; again, this is a patient population OTs work with quite often. The counselors recognize the value I bring to the client, allowing for forward emotional momentum through my ability to support the client in further developing internal emotional awareness and a sense of safety, as well as through strategies I teach about how to self-resource and self-regulate.

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**What encouragement or advice would you offer to an OT interested in incorporating CST into their practice approach?**

My first piece of advice is to find a craniosacral practitioner and experience a session for yourself. What I love about this work is the profound effect it has had on my own body, mind, and spirit, and sometimes words don't

adequately express the scope of what this work can shift and support. When I worked in the hospital setting I incorporated CST into patient care with profound feedback and results, and I also got my hands on any other OT, PT, and Speech Therapist who would let me work on them. I'm happy to say I helped create a legacy of at least eight other healthcare workers who went on to do CST and now incorporate it into their work in acute care. Several others went on to establish their own business that focuses primarily on client care from a craniosacral perspective.

The second piece of advice is to educate, educate, educate! It's not just about getting your own continuing education in this area but providing that education to others in healthcare — the physicians, nurses, therapists, counselors, *etc.* who all have their own paradigm from which to practice medicine. Providing education helps create a bridge between what is familiar and what is unknown and allows CST to become more widely understood and supported. It has vastly shifted the way I practice OT and has created a much more meaningful, collaborative, and profound way in which I support clients in healing their injuries, illnesses, and trauma so they can live their most meaningful and independent life.

There are several "schools" of craniosacral therapy from which to pursue education. Most of my trainings have been through the Upledger Institute, and I highly recommend the organization for continuing education. The educators there are from a variety of professional backgrounds and are highly trained, extremely knowledgeable, and incredibly supportive. The format offers a foundational bedrock that supports the cognitive, logical, and anatomical understanding of the work and provides the kinesthetic learning and experience that is essential to putting this work into practice.

When I say CST is "life-changing" I truly mean it. I highly recommend finding out for yourself if this work is a fit for you!

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### Heather Hinz, MS OTR/L, CST-T

Master of Science in Occupational Therapy: University of Central Arkansas (2002)

Certificated Cranial-Sacral Therapist (CST-T)

Certified Spiral Practitioner

Heather currently resides in Eugene, Oregon, where she operates her clinical practice, **With Insight, LLC**. If you want to learn more about her practice style, approach, and method, or have questions specifically about pursuing this area of practice, you can connect with her at: [withinsight.net@gmail.com](mailto:withinsight.net@gmail.com) or visit her professional website [www.withinsight.net](http://www.withinsight.net)