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Back in Cranio

Craniosacral touch therapy can help the body restore itself, gently

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When Gina Genest's clients come in for a massage, they're usually thinking "Mmm, give me a nice, firm rub-down." And they usually get one. But before all that starts, she sneaks in a little bit of something else: gentle pressure, about the weight of a nickel, a potentially powerful little something otherwise known as craniosacral therapy.

"I have clients say to me 'What were you doing to my head? I couldn't think,'" says Genest, a nationally certified massage and craniosacral therapist, from Exeter. "You couldn't think? That's good," she says. "That means it's working and it's quieting the mind."

First discovered and introduced in the early 1900s by an osteopathic physician, William Sutherland, this form of therapy wasn't widely accepted by the medical community, including other osteopaths.

Even after scientific research conducted in the 1970s by osteopathic physician John Upledger verified Sutherland's findings, this form of bodywork didn't catch on.

But recently, craniosacral therapy has been rediscovered by massage therapists, physical therapists, chiropractors, occupational therapists, acupuncturists and others in the healing professions as a noninvasive and painless way to help the body heal itself.

Similar to other healing techniques such as Reiki and acupuncture, craniosacral therapy seeks to bring the body back in balance. In the case of craniosacral therapy, though, balance lies in the cerebrospinal fluid in the spinal cord.

The premise of craniosacral therapy is based on Sutherland's discovery that the cerebrospinal fluid in the spinal column has its own rhythm apart from the heartbeat and breathing. He further postulated that keeping this rhythm balanced is vital to good health.

Craniosacral therapy, which had been further developed by Upledger, is believed to facilitate the body's ability to regulate this rhythm by using gentle palpation to release restrictions in the craniosacral system — allowing the body to return to a balanced state and heal itself.

"The body intuitively knows what it needs to do to heal. I'm simply a facilitator. I'm never bestowing anything upon a client. I'm putting my hands on specific locations and holding a space so that they can heal," says Genest.

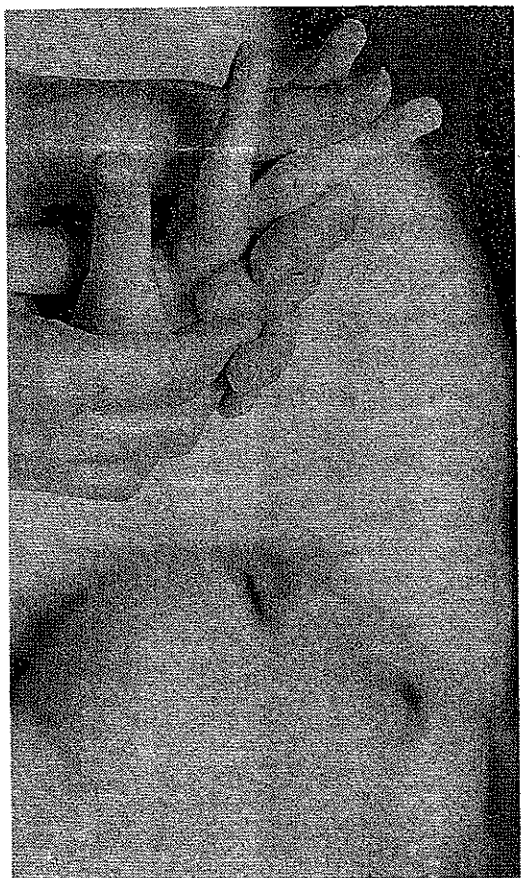
By placing her hands gently on specific bony places on the body, Genest can sense the rhythm of the fluid throughout the whole body. It's like an opening and a closing, she says. "We call it flexion and extension. It's extremely subtle."

Starting from the feet and working her way to the head, with her client fully clothed, Genest takes account of the body's rhythm and feels for areas where it isn't quite right.

"I've had adults who were so overworked and fatigued that their feet vibrate. Sometimes you find the rhythm in one foot goes out while the other one doesn't. That's blocked energy," says Genest.



Above, Gina Genest, a licensed massage therapist from Exeter, massages Benjamin Hassan's face and neck at his Exeter home. Benjamin, 14, has cerebral palsy and receives massage therapy at least once a week.



At right, Genest uses a lavender gel to massage Benjamin's hands during his weekly massage. Genest utilizes Swedish and craniosacral massage to promote relaxation and increase circulation for Benjamin.