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Nurse Lyne Oyama soothes 6-week-old Shama Zoniglan with a light touch on the skull, face and mouth.

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# Baby Bodywork

With whispering fingertips, therapists say they can heal chronic problems in little ones—from colic to irritability.

It's called craniosacral therapy, and some say it's the perfect therapy.

By LIZ BRODY  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

**I**t's all right. I work on you," the therapist says, kneeling on the rug where her patient lies. Cassie Rodan cheerfully indicates it's fine and Lyne Oyama begins their session.

"Now we're going to check out your patella," the therapist explains, while reaching for the patient's mouth. Cassie giggles and starts to fuss. Incessant she gets to full of Oyama's 3-year-old, 5 1/2-month-old

Cassie is getting a treatment from Oyama, a nurse who practices craniosacral therapy, or craniosacral therapy, at Santa Monica Children's Hospital in Santa Monica, Calif.

There's no snap, crack or pop. No massaging of muscles or jerking of bones. Here, therapists work on the hydraulic-like fluid involved with the nervous system, often by just cradling the head for minutes on end. Their touch is never heavier than the weight of a nickel, but it can be worth a lot more.

Take the case of 18-month-old Leanna Dresher. "Right after her birth I could see an indentation from the forceps near her left temple, and that was the site she got chronic ear infections on," says mother Pam Dresher, a Westside physical therapist. "After Lyne saw her three or four times, she never got another one."

Beyond clearing up ear infections, craniosacral therapy has also been shown to improve a wide range of infant problems, including irritability, sucking difficulties, constipation, colic.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has no official policy on craniosacral therapy and more likely than not, your own baby's doctor has never heard of it. As for those who have? "It's a pretty harmless intervention," says Dr. Jay Gordon, a Santa Monica pediatrician. "If a child is out of alignment—through a big fall or difficult birth—my common sense tells me that there could be some benefit to gently realigning them."

Many medical experts agree that craniosacral therapy is so mild that its biggest danger—at \$85-\$100 a session—may be to your purse.

But that's where Oyama is stepping in. She has just started a weekly clinic at the Chapman Center where parents can bring their infants in for craniosacral evaluation sessions—free.

"If babies start out balanced, at least they'll have a fighting chance," says Oyama, who also works full time as a nurse at Santa Monica Hospital in the newborn nursery and postpartum departments. This is not a replacement for medical care, she stresses. "It's complementary."

Not to be confused with cranio-osteopathy, chiropractic cranio-osteopathy or sacro-osteopathy techniques, which aim primarily to move bones, craniosacral therapy is less intrusive, nudging the patient's body to make its own corrections. Plus whispering fingertips, there are also finger pressure techniques in the separate form of the heartbeat or breathing rate—that belongs to the fluid and membranes surrounding

the brain and spinal cord. The bones of this craniosacral system—the skull, face and mouth (cranium)—are used merely as handles to gently unwind the membranes and restore the fluids' natural flow.

Why would newborns, fresh off the draining board, need any intervention? "C-sections are extremely traumatic because the baby goes from liquid to air very quickly, like a diver coming up too fast," says Oyama. "Normally, the mother's contractions help the bones of the cranium compress slowly. Here they just jam together."

Whether Cassie's digestive difficulties—due to a condition called gastroesophageal reflux, which has her spitting up 30 to 40 times a day—have anything to do with the way she was born, no one is sure. But Dr. Robert M. Starling, a pediatrician in the late '80s, reported in the *Journal of Cranio-Sacral Therapy* that he found a correlation between various delivery complications, craniosacral kinks and abnormalities—physical and behavioral problems—in 203 children.

Updegraff is the name usually mentioned in the same breath as craniosacral therapy. He is the man responsible over the last 20 years for developing the technique—a refinement of cranial osteopathy, which has been around since the 1830s. He is also founder of the Updegraff Institute in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, where thousands of craniosacral therapists, including Oyama, have trained.

This therapy has not been investigated in terms which would enable a community health underwriter to "accept" it quickly to underwrite it. "I can tell you what happens, no

why." One of the clearest whys is that in about half of all hypertensive children, the head is slightly jammed forward on the neck. Updegraff speculates that this position, possibly caused by being pinched out too hard or fast at birth, puts the brain under a slightly increased hydraulic pressure that may be the cause of the hypertension. When this is the problem, he says, craniosacral therapy can be quite effective.

Oyama, 46, discovered craniosacral therapy eight years ago. Her interest in babies grew out of reading adults and thinking, "If only I'd gotten to them earlier." But it would take 10 Gelfer-counter-fingerprints and lots of experience to put that thought into practice. If a grown person's craniosacral pulse is as hard to detect as the line below the one you can read on the E-chart, a newborn's rhythm is several lines below that.

While working on her digital gauge for several years, Oyama changed her nursing degree into a master's in human development. She has a Ph.D. in the anatomy of an infant, and she's got such a light touch," says Laura Paris, a Westside homemaker and doctor of Oriental medicine.

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