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Health and Fitness Section
"CranioSacral Therapy"
by Susan Danese

The car accident was more serious than Sharon had originally imagined. In the emergency room, the doctors diagnosed her injury as whiplash. They prescribed pain killers and sleeping pills for the temporary discomfort caused by the accident. Ten years later she was still taking 222's for the pain of daily headaches.

Sharon was desperate to find a release from pain. She tried working with a Homeopath who tested her for food allergies. Her problem did not seem to be food related. She consulted several doctors, who attempted to treat her symptoms with pain-killers. One doctor tried acupuncture. When the acupuncture failed to provide relief, the doctor suggested she try CranioSacral Therapy. "After ten years of pain, it took almost six months of CranioSacral Therapy to relieve my headaches," said Sharon. "I had a lot to work through. There was so much tension in my neck that I had to learn to relax before I could benefit from the gentle head manipulations. Now I only get headaches before my menstrual cycle. It's wonderful!"

Sharon is one of the many people who come to CranioSacral Therapy as a last resort. Most patients hear of the therapy through medical doctor, some come with a referral from their dentist or physiotherapist. However, you do not need a referral to explore the benefits of CranioSacral Therapy. Many clients discover this new technique by word of mouth. Don't wait until you are desperate to try this noninvasive therapy.

CranioSacral Therapy is not well known in Canada. In fact, there are only a handful of therapists in the country compared to hundreds who practise in the United States.

Training in CranioSacral techniques is done in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. Students are primarily American health practitioners: doctors, dentists, physiotherapists, chiropractors and registered massage therapists. Perhaps this is why there are so few Canadians practising this technique.

GENTLE TOUCH

CranioSacral Therapy has provided relief to many chronic pain sufferers. The technique is gentle, involves no drugs, surgery or medical equipment and is successful for 85 per cent of all patients. Those interviewed have expressed relief from pain,

restoration of functions and mobility, correction of neurological disorders such as ringing in the ears, dyslexia, vertigo, stabismus and reduction of stress related problems.

Mark falls asleep during his therapy session. Mark is eight and a half years old. His mother reports that Mark had a difficult delivery. "As a child he had constant ear infections. His ears would fill with fluid which provided a breeding ground for infections. He was always taking antibiotics. The doctors suggested inserting plastic tubes in his ears." Instead she tried CranioSacral Therapy.

Mark caught a cold the week after his first therapy session. Instead of his usual pattern of developing an ear infection, he shook the cold in days. Within four sessions of gentle manipulation which put him to sleep, Mark was cured of chronic ear infections. His mother has since taken a CranioSacral course for lay people to provide some maintenance work on Mark.

According to CranioSacral Therapists, injury to the skull at birth or later in life may result in abnormal compression beneath the skull. The skull is composed of individual cranial bones which are separated by sutures. The Osteopath who developed the CranioSacral Therapy technique, Dr. John Upledger, has conducted and published research to prove that these sutures are soft and living, not calcified and hard, as current medical thought believes. Dr. Upledger's life work has been dedicated to scientifically proving and teaching the concepts behind CranioSacral Therapy.

In 1975, he led an interdisciplinary research team of biophysicists, anatomists, bioengineers and physiologists who concluded that the sutures are soft to allow for movement in cranial bones. Dr. Upledger realized that dysfunction of the central nervous system or brain occurs when one or more of the cranial sutures are compressed, restricting the natural movement of the cranial bones and membranes which surround the brain and spinal cord. These restrictions can adversely affect cranial nerves. The symptoms arising from restricted cranial-sacral systems can be very severe. Robert F. Harris, a Toronto CranioSacral Therapist explains, "Our bodies are in continual motion. The body's need to have freedom of motion as a requirement for health. Stasis will impair functions: vascular circulation may become restricted, cellular fluid balances may be altered and the nerve fibre is subject to compression which can cause intense pain or abnormal nerve activity."

CINDY

Cindy was troubled by a restriction in her throat that inhibited swallowing. Soon her ear began to ache. When the pain became chronic, she consulted her doctor. He suggested that Cindy should avoid hard, chewy foods and talk to her dentist. Her dentist saw no reason for the earache as her bite was evenly

balanced. In frustration, Cindy consulted an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist. He conducted a C.A.T. Scan (a very expensive, three dimensional X-Ray) on Cindy's head. There were no tumors blocking the throat. Eventually one of Cindy's family members suggested she call a CranioSacral Therapist.

"Robert answered my call. He said that my complaint was not unusual," said Cindy. "Every other therapist made me feel like I was being a hypochondriac!"

"The process of the therapy session was so unusual. I remained clothed, laying on my back on a massage table. The therapist held my feet for a moment. Then he seemed to scan my legs with his hands. When he rested his palm down over my heart, the spot was sensitive to the touch and seemed to generate a lot of heat. He also placed a hand under my back at the same location. When he worked on my head he touched spots in my neck that were sore, but he applied very little pressure. His hands went directly to the places that hurt, in the throat and in the ear which he gently stretched upward. It felt like a stretch for my ear canal."

CranioSacral Therapy aims to release movement restrictions and restore normal functions to the affected area. The therapist achieves this by detecting restriction in the body. Cindy described how Robert "scanned" her legs. In fact, he was palpating particular sites on the body to assess the patient's personal CranioSacral Rhythm. This rhythm is created by a fluid which surrounds and bathes the brain and spinal cord and circulates beneath the cranial bones. The fluctuation in volume and pressure of the cerebro-spinal fluid is referred to as the CranioSacral Rhythm. Once detected, the rhythm will tell the therapist where restrictions are located in the patient's body. The therapist then uses gentle manipulations on these sites to release the restriction.

Joe, a premature baby, had been diagnosed at birth with Wet Lung. His condition inhibited his breathing. Doctors at the Sick Children's Hospital in Toronto treated the baby with antibiotics and breathing tubes. Three months later he was back in the hospital with Meningitis. He was isolated and given antibiotics. When the infection subsided his mother took her General Practitioner's advice and visited the Cranial Therapy Centre. The baby was continually vomiting and crying. When Alix McLaughlin, CranioSacral Therapist, began to work on him, he was still noticeably agitated.

"Within one month he was bright and calm," says his mother. "The doctors at Sick Children's Hospital still can't believe his progress. At 20 months my son can repeat his alphabet, count up to ten and then count down, he recognizes letters and is a content baby."

Joe's General Practitioner, Dr. Chris Hassell, is one of the few doctors in Toronto who is familiar with CranioSacral Therapy. Dr. Hassell saw the baby after the Meningitis had passed. "He was still vomiting and uncomfortable," says Dr. Hassell. "There was something within him that wasn't balanced, and I sensed that he would continue to get sick unless it was changed."

Dr. Hassell was introduced to CranioSacral principals as a medical student at the British School of Osteopathy. He has made several referrals to CranioSacral Therapists and is pleased with the results. "After one month of weekly CranioSacral treatments, Joe appeared more placid and socially integrated, the child seems to be at peace with his environment. He's a beautiful baby, now," concludes Dr. Hassell.

If you are interested in further information on CranioSacral Therapy, or if you would like to make an appointment with a therapist in Toronto, call the Cranial Therapy Centre on 110 Richmond St. E., telephone (416) 368-6855.

A workshop based on CranioSacral Therapy principles will be offered to the public on March 11, 1989. This presentation will instruct interested participants in easy techniques to relieve headaches, reduce stress, control pain, improve relaxation and enhance general health. This is a full day program. There is no set fee, however, donations are gratefully accepted. The money will be used to train more people in the principles of CranioSacral Therapists first, before they accept drugs or surgery to relieve pain.