

Craniosacral Therapy and Torticollis: Gently Unraveling Tension without Tears



Many parents are coming home from the doctor with an unfamiliar diagnosis for their infant-torticollis, the shortening or tightening of the front neck muscles on one side, causing the baby's head to tilt. But a new study shows gentle therapy techniques like craniosacral therapy can significantly reduce this tension and tilt, without the crying and fussing that traditional treatments can cause.

Doctors try to intervene early when they notice symptoms of torticollis because the tightness and tilt, when combined with the "back to sleep" advice to protect babies against SIDS, can lead to a bigger and more significant diagnosis - plagiocephaly. When a baby lays on one side of the head almost all of the time, their soft skull bones can quickly flatten on one side, requiring more intervention later, like baby helmets and other treatments.

The main treatment doctors prescribe for torticollis is stretching to increase the baby's range of motion. But babies don't take to this intervention lightly. Most parents report their baby cries and resists being stretched, even very gently. So while the stretching is an effective treatment, many parents don't want to do it or find it impossible to do with their child.

A [new study just published in the Journal of Physical Therapy Science](#) shows that gentle neural visceral manipulation significantly improved a baby's range of motion and neck rotation after 8 weeks of treatment and four months after treatment stopped. What's more, the babies receiving treatment didn't cry and experience stress - music to a parent's ears! Neural and visceral manipulation is a technique very similar to craniosacral therapy. With roots in France, it uses many similar techniques to apply gentle and subtle pressure and movement to help the body heal itself. VM and CST both practice under the [International Association of Healthcare Practitioners](#).

This isn't the first time that practices like CST and VM have been shown to help torticollis and plagiocephaly. Check out this case study of Baby Brandon, a six-month old with plagiocephaly and facial asymmetry, whose [symptoms completely resolved after 11 sessions](#) with a craniosacral therapist:

Brandon had multiple asymmetries in the face and cranium, with significant 45 degree flattening of the occipito-parietal region on the left from midline transverse plane of 0 degrees. There were several restrictions noted in the spine, with pelvic obliquity as well. The lumbo-sacral, occipito-atlantal and spheno-basilar joints were all very compressed, with asymmetry in the spheno-basilar joint. He had several other symptoms including difficulty with latch and suck strength and control, hypersensitive gag reflex, mild reflux initially, and constipation. All of these resolved.

Brandon progressed rapidly improving his gross motor skills from the 5th percentile on the AIMS, to the 50th percentile in 40 days. He could turn head actively in all directions, creep in four-point, and roll supine to prone and back in both directions, as well as sit independently with protective extension in all directions. He resolved facial symmetry with neutral eyes, and eye slit size, and neutral mandible, and ears level and closer antero-posteriorly. In all, Brandon made remarkable progress with frequent intervention, and cranial contouring took place naturally as the cranial restrictions were freed up.

The study also noted that craniosacral therapy was considerably less expensive and less intrusive for Brandon than a traditional treatment plan for plagiocephaly - 11 one-hour sessions at \$1500 vs. 6-months in a helmet for 23 hours a day, at a cost of about \$4000!

In my practice, I've seen many infants with torticollis and plagiocephaly and the dramatic improvement they experience after even just a few sessions of craniosacral. As a mom, I want my tiniest clients to be comfortable and relaxed - the only real way that our bodies can heal. When I treat a baby, we move and adjust based on what the baby is comfortable with. If a baby is fussy or unhappy, we adjust the situation, backing off if needed, trusting that every baby knows what is right for their body. Nursing, toys, bubbles, rocking, singing - all are common in my sessions with infants, and most parents are pleasantly surprised by how happy and relaxed their little ones are, even babies who are chronically colicky or won't go to anyone but mom!

If you're wondering if craniosacral could help your baby with torticollis or plagiocephaly, please feel free to reach out to me at kelly@stbrigidscst.com or [book an appointment online](#).

<https://www.stbrigidscst.com/post/craniosacral-therapy-and-torticollis-gently-unraveling-tension-without-tears?fbclid=IwAR3eJYtcjdWRUameOWRPRcz7pUcuimkGo0I21owCHPaNqbe6Zb0-yd4ktDo>

