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Craniosacral therapy explores the history of your body while easing pain and stress

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Lauren Christman, top, who has a craniosacral therapy practice, works with Nicole Tsong. Christman was explaining some of the therapy's goals and techniques. (Ken Lambert/The Seattle Times)

Massage therapist Lauren Christman uses quiet observation and gentle pressure in a session with Nicole Tsong.

By

[Nicole Tsong](#)

Special to The Seattle Times

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS of seeing skilled bodyworkers and body experts — sometimes with pain from an injury, often without — my advice on bodywork is to go before anything hurts.

And if something hurts? Go. Now.

I saw massage therapist Lauren Christman for a craniosacral session. I didn't have any pain or a specific injury to work on. My right hip nags at me on occasion, but it doesn't stop me from doing anything active. I am healthy.

Still, if you ever want to know more about your body's history, go to a skilled bodyworker. I find digging into my body's history of movement patterns and injury fascinating.

First off, Christman and I went over where I had pain or previous injury. With someone like me, Christman said, we would be tinkering rather than working through a specific problem. Craniosacral massage focuses on the head and spine, using a gentle touch, and she often sees people for brain injuries, headaches, trauma and stress. She also works with babies who might be struggling to nurse, or to sleep.

We started with a postural assessment, with Christman checking my feet and joints. I've been focused on shifting my weight over my heels, and she advised me not to go too far back. Instead, she suggested I move my pelvis to the point where I feel tallest, which is slightly forward of where I had been working.

At the massage table, she looked at my feet and legs. She noticed that the tissue near an old injury was twisted. She did some gentle movements to get my right hip flexor/groin to unwind. She also could feel how my left hip compensated for my right. With some gentle pulling and movement, I could feel my hip start to release.

Christman moved to the side and put one hand under my head and another under my sacrum, the bony section just above your tailbone. She cradled the length of my spine and closed her eyes. The pauses during her work were often long and quiet.

Craniosacral therapists observe your cerebrospinal fluid, which moves in roughly eight-, 20- and 100-second cycles, Christman said. My flow was good from my tailbone up until she got to my left shoulder, she said, where the flow contracted. She could work on my connective tissue to help the fluid move, or manipulate the fluid to move back into my shoulder, she said.

After working my spine, Christman returned to my pelvis and asked whether I was experiencing problems with my sacroiliac joint. Funny she should ask: The past couple of months, I have had a few rounds of SI joint pain.

Christman had asked me before the session about head injuries, and I told her about a concussion I had in college. After working on my spine and pelvis, she moved to my head and started gentle pressure around my skull to manipulate the tissue and bones. I was already relaxed, and when she started to work on my head, I succumbed and closed my eyes, nearly nodding off.

When Christman was done, she told me she could feel some impact on the tissue in my head from the concussion. Tissue contracts in a concussion, and the fluid doesn't move as freely. Working on it could be a good next step.

Much of the experience was subtle and allowed me to relax and observe nuanced shifts in my hip and skull. If you are looking for a softer approach to relieve stress and chronic pain, consider craniosacral therapy.

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