

# Equine WELLNESS

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## Is your horse unshod?

Not all horses need shoes all the time, however, there are times when protection is needed. [Click to Read More](#)



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## Craniosacral Therapy 101

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The first time I saw craniosacral therapy performed on a horse, it was one of my own. I had purchased a Trakehner gelding from a rescue, and he had some significant health and pain issues. He'd been started too young, pushed too hard, and his body hadn't been allowed to develop properly. His owner had a nasty wreck with him on the eventing field, and both came away injured. He became angry, dangerous, and was three-legged lame. A period of traditional veterinary care at one of the country's leading veterinary medical schools did not resolve the issues, so the woman who'd bred him to take her to the Olympics gave him to the rescue.

He was still a very angry and dangerous boy when I found him. And he was still lame. So why did I bring him home with me? I asked myself that very question as he charged me daily for no good reason, teeth bared and ears pinned. He was big and he'd learned he could easily intimidate people. Even in photos taken at the time, I can see the pain in his eyes.

Since then, however, he has become my teacher and sage. He has led me to a more natural way of keeping and working with my horses.



## Craniosacral Therapy

I pursued many treatment modalities for my troubled gelding. He introduced me to chiropractics, and to energy work and bodywork, including craniosacral therapy (CST). This type of work helps injury pain and emotional issues. When I watched his first CST treatment, it was absolutely jaw dropping. But at first he wanted no part of it. He hurt to be touched, and he tried to get away from the practitioner in every way possible.

Once the treatment began, my horse tossed his head in every direction in an attempt to escape the practitioner's hands. He lifted his head as high as he could, then plunged it to the ground. He would toss side to side, thrashing about to avoid the help that was being offered. But after a few minutes, I watched him settle. His breathing changed, and he started to relax a bit. Finally he let out a big breath and began to lick and chew. It was amazing to watch him release.

Every time the practitioner began with his hands in a new place, the horse would fight him again. But each time he was less rebellious than before. After the final big release, the practitioner removed his hands from the horse's face. I was aghast. Where his hands had been very lightly touching my horse's face, there was foam – as if someone had put a light coat of shaving cream on him. It looked as if the practitioner had left white handprints on the big bay's face. It was like something out of the *Twilight Zone*.

Even the practitioner was shocked. He said, "I've been doing this more than 25 years, and I've never seen anything like this."

My gelding had released so much pain and stress and negative emotion that he'd broken into a sweat. I've encountered this only once doing bodywork myself, and it's a stunning experience. And I can tell you I had a different horse on my hands almost immediately. That's the great part about doing energy work on animals. They live in the present – and there's no placebo effect.

## What is CST?

Craniosacral therapy (CST) was developed by a human osteopath, Dr. William Sutherland, well over 100 years ago. He and many others since have conducted extensive studies on the benefits of this form of bodywork, and have achieved amazing results in their human patients. The therapy has since been applied to the anatomy of other animals, including horses and dogs.

Dr. Sutherland discovered that there was a predictable flow and "pulse". This flow exhibits as a "wave" and is considered by craniosacral practitioners as the third pulse in the body, similar to heartbeat and breathing. Dr. Sutherland's premise is that the sutures that connect the bones of the skull were designed to allow for subtle movement. There is a connection between the motion of these bones and related tissues: cerebrospinal fluid, the central nervous system, and the sacrum.

This "third pulse" should flow freely via the cerebrospinal fluid from cranium to sacrum. However, the central nervous system, and hence the craniosacral flow, is negatively impacted by:

- Injury or trauma (to the head, spine or hind end)
- Stress or negative emotions
- Toxicity
- Normal aging process

Restrictions in the flow result in an imbalance of the overall system. Imbalances can result in one or more of the following symptoms/ailments:

- Cribbing and weaving
- Head shaking/tossing • Tail wringing
- Tinnitus
- Blocked tear ducts
- TMJ (as a result of poor biting, conformation issues or dental care)

Craniosacral therapy frees the restricted motion in the bones of the skull, the vertebral column, and the pelvis. By manipulating the central nervous system and influencing and restoring the optimal "pulse", this therapy can restore balance.

CST also realigns the skeletal structure and relaxes the animal. It can release trauma and negative emotions, enhancing the body's own selfhealing abilities. CST involves a subtle, hands-on stimulation. It is very gentle and subtle. Yet the impact on the animal is profound. Unlike bodywork with humans, there is no placebo effect in our companion animals. They live in the present and have no expected outcomes when presented with a treatment modality.

## How to find a practitioner

As with many alternative therapies, the Western culture has been slow to accept the healing benefits associated with craniosacral work. Traditional Chinese Medicine has long appreciated these subtleties and flows through similar treatment modalities. Indian, Italian and Russian cultures have also studied and taught craniosacral and similar therapies for over 100 years. The ancient Egyptian and Peruvian cultures practiced similar methods of treating illness and disease.

Currently, no official certifications are required to practice craniosacral therapy on equines. This makes it more difficult to find a reliable and effective practitioner. It is critical that practitioners have a solid foundation in equine anatomy and physiology. Unfortunately, many practitioners have received minimal training.

Dr. John Upledger began teaching CST techniques to nonosteopaths in the 1970s and is considered the founder of modern craniosacral therapy for humans. Many equine practitioners have completed Dr. Upledger's courses for humans and continued their study in applying these techniques to equines and canines.

Interest in equine craniosacral therapy has increased in recent years, so many training programs have emerged. However, no professional association or certification yet exists. So how do you find a responsible practitioner?

- Ask for referrals from other horse owners in your area.
- Search the internet for local resources.
- Ask your equine bodyworker or veterinarian for a referral.

My gelding has been fully detoxed and has received other work since his craniosacral session, but no change was as dramatic as that first session. He is thriving and continues to teach me and help me teach others.

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***Sandy Siegrist** is a lifelong horsewoman who practices natural horsemanship, healing and horse care techniques. She works with clients throughout the U.S. to evaluate their feeding and horsekeeping programs based on their horses' specific needs. She also does energy work and overall health analyses, often taking in horses for more extensive rehabilitation. Sandy's approach to horse care is based on natural and alternative therapy techniques and incorporates bio-energy testing, craniosacral therapy, acupuncture, kinetics, herbs and*

flower essences, among others. Her lectures and articles address nutrition, hoof care, bodywork, worming, vaccinations, and emotional well-being, grounded in maintaining a more natural environment and healthcare practices. [perfectanimalhealth.co](http://perfectanimalhealth.co)

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