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BABYHE

Craniosacral Therapy for Babies

How CST can help relieve stress from birth trauma, colic and more

By *Nancy Schatz Alton*

After realizing the moms in her mom-and-baby yoga classes were not aware of how helpful craniosacral therapy (CST) might be for their babies, Colette Crawford, RN, founder of Seattle Holistic Center, decided to become a craniosacral therapist. “Over 20 years ago there was this movement that made new moms aware of how this gentle therapy could help their babies, but five years ago the moms in my yoga classes were not raising their hands when I asked if they had heard of or tried craniosacral therapy with their babies.”

After referring infants and mothers to CST therapists for reasons such as birth trauma and colic, Crawford wanted to be able to offer this gentle, hands-on therapy herself. “I’ll put one hand under the back skull and one hand under the sacrum, and I’m just holding the baby’s “handles” (where the spinal membrane attaches to the bone) and we see the baby relax. Now the mother is relaxed, too; I’m treating the baby and the mother is treated, too,” Crawford says.

Beyond the deep level of relaxation that CST can provide, moms bring their infants and babies to craniosacral therapists for many reasons, including:

- Birth trauma, such as issues from a vacuum or forceps extraction or an emergency C-section
- Trouble with breastfeeding
- Constipation
- Gastrointestinal pain and acid reflux
- Colic
- Not sleeping well, including early days when day and night seem to be reversed for the infant
- Teething pain
- Head-shape issues
- Problems stemming from the birthing process
- Earaches
- Developmental delays

For example, Heather Islander, LMP, CST, MIT, a Seattle-based practitioner whose training includes pediatric CST, treated a baby who wasn't walking at age 2.

"The temporal and parietal bones located on the top and side of the baby's head were overlapped from a difficult birth. During birth, the bones of the head naturally override and then expand back out as part of the birth process, but this baby's bones had been unable to expand out to the ideal neutral position," Islander says. "The areas of the brain that had been affected process proprioception and balance. We were able to gently unhook that override in that first session. The day after treatment, the baby started crawling backwards, and soon she was pulling herself up to stand. Three days after the session, she was taking steps without any assistance."

While no one claims CST is a cure-all for every infant issue, CST practitioners note that when a baby has compression anywhere in the craniosacral system — from the head at the top of the spine to the sacrum at the base — this type of massage can alleviate that compression, leading to symptom alleviation. An example of this is when a baby has had a frenotomy to free up a tongue-tied tongue and ease breastfeeding issues. Sometimes the breastfeeding issues continue and parents seek out CST for their babies.

"Craniosacral therapy eases the tightness in the baby's mouth, head and neck, leading to breastfeeding success. Birth also effects the alignment of the baby's head and body. CST aligns the body structurally and gets all the systems working properly — eating, pooping, sleeping," says Barbara Coon, LMT, an advanced CST therapist who practices in Seattle.

The stress behind a child having any problem at all combined with the stress of babyhood and parenthood can make craniosacral therapy a fit for the whole family. Often practitioners will treat a parent and the baby during the same appointment. "Often it's the mother or the father that needs treatment; the baby is just fine," Crawford says. She tells the story of a patient who said the only time his mind could turn off and he could relax was when he was on her massage table receiving CST.

This idea extends to the post-birth days after any type of birth, but especially if the birth process was traumatic birth. CST practitioner Coon likes to have the mother hold the baby while she is working on the baby's head and often the mother will tell the baby's birth story.

"It's such a nourishing experience. What I find when the mother is telling the story, the baby will be pressing into my hands, teaching me and showing me what takes place in birth. I feel this incredible connection to the birthing process while the mother holds her baby in her arms."

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Writer, editor and writing coach Nancy Schatz Alton is finishing the last draft of her memoir about the beginning of her dyslexic daughter's learning journey. She is the co-author of two holistic health care guides, *The Healthy Back Book* and *The Healthy Knees Book*. When not navigating parenthood, she uses her brainpower to write, edit and fact-check articles for websites and magazines. She lives in Ballard with her husband and two daughters. Find her blog at [Within the Words](#).