



The New Therapy on the Block(ages)

Its touch is very gentle to the body but it's not exactly a massage. Introducing Cranio Sacral Therapy (CST)—it's fast catching on in the West, and now it's making its appearance in Singapore

THE NAME OF THIS TREATMENT didn't exactly put me at ease. The sound of the words cranio and sacral, made me half convinced that I would be submitted to all manner of vice-like machines, strange stretching contraptions and definitely the kind of manipulation usually reserved for contortionists or Chinese acrobats. So did cranio-sacral therapy live up to its torture chamber description?

Scary Crane Therapy?

For most Singaporeans, especially those of us more used to an aromatherapy massage, or even a mud wrap, getting the therapy's name totally wrong and wondering if it is actually named after a frightening bird is almost forgivable, since very few therapists here offer the treatment. However, in the U.K. and U.S., cranio sacral therapy is a well established method for treating pain and injuries and with 40,000 practitioners worldwide, the treatment is steadily gaining acceptance from the bodywork profession as a whole.

Unlike massage or shiatsu, which work on muscles or tissues, CST deals with another scary sounding body system – the cerebro-spinal fluid. This flows through membranes along the spinal cord and around the brain and is constantly draining and refilling, creating its own rhythm which is different from breathing and circulation. Now, if all that mention of membranes and spinal fluid isn't already making you feel a tad queasy, this may well do the trick – the founder of CST, John Upledger discovered this CST rhythm when he was assisting on neck surgery in 1972 and he



noticed that a section of membrane was moving to its own rhythm, so strongly that he had trouble holding it still.

Anyway, he was so fascinated that he has since spent 30 years developing CST and has set up his own Institute devoted to promoting and developing the treatment.

How Does the Therapy Help?

Craniosacral actually refers to your cranium and sacrum, otherwise known as your skull and the base of your spine. Not nearly so scary as their other names would suggest.

By monitoring the rhythm of spinal fluid between the cranium and sacrum, CST therapists can pinpoint areas of stress, injury or pain, and since the brain and spinal chord are the big guys of the central nervous system, working on the spinal fluid should be able to tackle many things that ail us – from old injuries to headache to nervous disorders.

Once a therapist has located a source of trauma or stress, they can assist the natural movement of the spinal fluid to help the body fix itself.

CST and Me

Craniosacral therapy is performed with the client

fully clothed, which was quite reassuring to me as I didn't fancy being in my birthday suit as my therapist, Adida, wrenched my head off (which was what I was expecting).

The session began with Adida asking me to breathe and watch my breath. She also sat quietly, breathing. Later she told me that she was centering herself to be 'neutral' so that she could listen to my spinal fluid and pick up on problem areas. She was also allowing me to slow down and be more in tune with my own body.

She then placed both her hands lightly on top of my feet, and that's when things went weird. Adida's touch had only the pressure equivalent to that of a 10 cent coin—all CST is done this way—but I felt as though two bolts of electricity shot straight up my legs. It didn't hurt but tears began trickling uncontrollably down my cheeks. Adida was unfazed – “just breathe. Your eyelids are flickering, you're getting rid of trauma” (oh so that's what it was – and indeed, along with the trickling, my eyes were twitching like frenzied breakdancers) But oddly, me, who usually panics at anything untoward happening in my body, just kept on with the breathing, and as Adida moved her hands to rest lightly on my head and neck, gently reminding me that I was safe and I was home, I felt myself drift into an utterly blissful realm – I kid you not – I was not asleep, not awake, and definitely unwilling to move a muscle – in fact, I did wonder, briefly if I'd ever move again, since my body seemed to have liquefied and melted into the massage table, but I truly didn't mind.

Now, before you dismiss me as another new-age, post-modern hippy, I can only say that this is what happened to me, and no, I hadn't been for a few one-for-one's at happy hour beforehand—I'm a Buddhist, remember.

All in all, the treatment lasted about an hour but in truth, it could've been a week and I wouldn't have known the difference. Afterward, I lay on the table for a long time, grinning stupidly, unwilling to leave the remarkable experience behind. When Adida finally threw me out, (no, that's not true) everything was loose and limber and I felt light, bubbly and really present to what was around me.



Not all people have the same dramatic reaction as I did (once a drama queen, always one!). Saleha Hakim, an Office Manager who has regular sessions, had never heard about CST when she tried it. She felt that the treatment actually started without her realizing it and gradually “her whole body opened up”. Now, she can actually feel her body twitching and notices the subtle movement of fluid during a treatment and she sees nothing strange in the fact that by touching the body you can release old emotional wounds since “the two are intimately connected.”

Lynne Doiron experienced no trauma and found that the entire experience left her “walking on air”. “What's good enough for babies, is good enough for me,” she adds.

So What Is Happening With All This Hands-On Business?

Adida says that by placing her hand on different parts of the body, she is subtly manipulating the membranes surrounding the bones of the head, neck and spine to balance the flow of fluid. She stresses that she can do it because she is mindful and present (hmm, that sounds familiar). She says that when she picks up a message from the body, she uses her hands like a mirror and reflects back to the body which will then alter the flow of spinal fluid itself.

She also says that the body stores memory in its tissues and fluid, so that when a person cries (or their eyelids go ballistic) and if the therapy brings up painful emotional incidents of the past, this is its way of releasing the trauma from the body.

Interestingly, Adida came to CST after having suffered from migraines for many years. She was fed up with taking drugs, and through meditation, and other natural therapies she realized that the body can help itself – she just wasn't sure how it was done until she experienced CST. She says the real challenge and gift of CST is not to be a 'healer' but to let go of the idea of self and ego. She says she is just there as an open and non-judging channel to allow the body to get on with its own healing process.

So How Many Treatments Do You Need

I've had three cranio-sacral treatments and each one was unique, reflecting my mental state at the time. The second treatment was more intellectual, as though my body was trying to figure out how the therapy worked, but by the third one, Adidia honed into an old back injury and once again, the results were dramatic, as under her feather light touch, the area began to pulse with pain so intense I could hardly bear it until it finally ebbed away quietly, like a tantrum that had run its course. The old nagging pain has been much, much better since –and I swear that Adidia hasn't slipped me a few \$50s to write that.

Adidia adds that treatments elicit a different response every time for every patient. Sometimes a client may wish to talk about past difficulties, sometimes he or she may sleep, and at other times reaction to the treatment will be minimal.

Who Is It For?

Since you literally just lie there, with your clothes on, Craniosacral therapy really can be for anyone. It's been used to treat babies with colic, people with

depression, those suffering from migraines, the elderly with orthopedic problems, or any of us with good ol' computer-itis. Even the Duke of Edinburgh opted for CST when he broke a leg falling off a polo pony – hope the horse got some too!

Does It Really Work?

The Upledger Institute cites the results of a plethora of studies to support the scientific validity of CST, many of which were conducted when Upledger was Professor of Biomechanics at Michigan State University.

However, since it deals with issues such as energy flow, muscle memory and the subtle movement of fused bones, not all quarters of the traditional medical fraternity are so keen to recommend it.

But no one says that it will harm you in any way, and only those with an existing internal bleeding disorder such as aneurysm are warned off it.

Who does it in Singapore?

CST practitioners are still a rare breed here. Apart from Adida, who is the only therapist in Singapore with a diploma from the UK's Academy of Bio-cranial Resonance, and who is also a massage therapist (she often combines the two therapies at Atlas Chiropractic Clinic (Tel: 6333 5300) where she works, qualified CST therapists also work at Light Streams Chiropractic (Tel: 6463 4205) and Healing Circle (Tel: 6733 3507). Cost ranges from \$70 to \$150 and a session is usually about an hour or as long as the client needs.

Frankly, for me, CST still retains its air of mystery, though all the sinister vibes have evaporated. I can't really say I thoroughly understand how it works, but it really did work for me. It is just as acupuncture operates on a system that Western medicine doesn't really acknowledge and yet has remarkable results, so does CST.

If you want to try it, just open your heart and mind to it – oh and don't be put off by its name. Given the results I've had from it, though it may be very gentle, its effects can be so powerful that perhaps it does deserve a scary and serious name after all. 

