



ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES - CRANIAL OSTEOPATHY

What is Cranial Osteopathy?

Dr William Garner Sutherland developed the basic principles of cranial osteopathy. He discovered that the 26 bones making up the skull were intricately joined in such a way as to permit very slight motion. He understood that this was in order to permit a rhythmical and very slight expansion/contraction of the brain inside, which is quite independent of breathing and heartbeat. Later Dr Sutherland found that it was possible to detect variation in frequency, amount and quality of the cyclical motion between different patients and even on the same patient depending on age, state of general health, emotional health and history of specific injury – especially injuries involving the head.

The discovery of cranial motion led on to the understanding that this involuntary motion of the skull and its contents is present in all tissues of the body, and is a basic property of living tissue. When body tissues are subject to trauma such as infections this involuntary motion is disrupted. If the trauma is mild, then the body can dissipate the effects, and no permanent damage is caused. However, if severe enough, the tissues may not return to their previous state, and a permanent record of their trauma remains. This is palpable to trained hands.

How can a Cranial Osteopath help?

A Cranial Osteopath is trained to detect and assess the dynamic state of the body tissues, both within the cranium and the rest of the body. He/she will first take a detailed case history from the patient, then using this detailed knowledge of anatomy and physiology will assess the pattern and quality of motion and try to put together the 'story' of what traumas have not been well accommodated by the body, and why present symptoms have developed. He/She will support the body in its attempt to return to health, by using gentle techniques to release strain patterns. This type of treatment is suitable for everyone from new-born babies to the very elderly, being extremely gentle.

Cranial Osteopathy is aimed not simply towards the relief of symptoms, but towards helping the body function better in all respects by releasing accumulated structural strains. The body's own self-healing and self-regulating ability is assisted hopefully to a point where the body can maintain itself in a state of health without assistance from its Osteopath. Patients often report an improvement in general well being, energy levels sleep patterns and also in areas of symptoms other than those which brought them to the Cranial Osteopath in the first place.

What does 'Cranial Treatment' feel like?

The patient is occasionally quite unaware apart from the contact of the Osteopath's hands that anything is happening at all. He/She may feel sensations of pressure either under the osteopath's hands or elsewhere, or a sensation of localised warmth as a release and relaxation is achieved in the tissues. Overall most patients feel that gradually the tension is being drawn out of their body, and they become deeply relaxed.

Finding a qualified practitioner and further information

Most people consult an osteopath privately. Telephone local practices to find out about their expertise and fees. An increasing number of osteopaths work in GP practices so that it may be possible for your doctor to refer you to an osteopath on the NHS.

A Cranial Osteopath who is properly qualified will have already completed a four-year training in Osteopathy. Under the 1993 act anyone calling themselves an Osteopath must be registered. Cranial work is incorporated as part of the training. Some will

supporting people in the UK, the Republic of Ireland and worldwide

go on to use cranial treatments, as part of their general Osteopathy work but some will decide to specialise solely in Cranial osteopathy. Extra training courses develop this skill and it would be useful to ask your Cranial Osteopath if they have attended any SCTF courses (Sutherland Cranial Teaching Foundation) or SCCC (Sutherland Cranial College Courses) as this may mean they have more expertise in this area.

You may come across the term Cranio-sacral therapy. This is not the same as Cranial Osteopathy who have already trained to become an Osteopath and will have undertaken further training in Cranial Osteopathy.

You can get further help from the General Osteopathic Council in London tel 020 7357 6655.

How it helped me

Two years ago I became very ill and after some months was diagnosed with viral encephalitis (in my case brain stem encephalitis). As well as the physical difficulties such as some paralysis, co-ordination problems, tremors, chronic joint pain. Night sweats, etc I had difficulties with too much mental stimulation such as noise, lights, lots of people, and a great deal of physical and mental fatigue.

My recovery has been slow and steady but during the first few months I felt very stuck in a rut and I was making little or no progress. I was feeling desperately ill all the time and I was isolated from any kind of professional or medical help. After my first few sessions with a Cranial Osteopath I felt I had turned a major corner and for the first time in five months I felt a slight easing of my symptoms. It was like my body had been given a kick-start and from then on my fortnightly visits became a positive experience as I gradually began to make steps towards recovery. Gradually my co-ordination and balance began to improve and I could walk further. I also had improvements in my general well being and physical and mental stamina. I had quite a lot of involuntary muscle jerks but it helped enormously to calm down what I described as my 'twitchy' body. I was scared about anyone touching my 'alien' body and initially frightened it might make me feel worse. It didn't though and I found it extremely gentle. I would describe it as warm hands cradling my skull and spine, whilst very gently pressing on certain areas.

The psychological support was also very helpful. I always felt reassured after my treatment and it was good to offload my fears about my body with someone outside of my family who could listen and offer support. I am certain this helped to keep me sane (well moderately!) during my low periods.

I was lucky in that I went to someone who was very experienced. I would recommend that before embarking on Cranial Osteopathy you find the most experienced person in your area.

After 18 months I moved to a new area and I am not having Cranial Osteopathy at the moment but would not hesitate in going again in the future. I am still experiencing problems but I am continuing to recover on what seems to be an infinite journey back to health.

Vicki Kenny

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