

# SET TALK

By Don McCann, MA, LMT, LMHC

MA3267 MH705 MM3717

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## INTEGRATING CRANIAL TECHNIQUES AND MASSAGE

A perfect marriage: Two distinct techniques that restore homeostasis can only enhance each other when integrated into one treatment. The massage therapist who can apply effective massage techniques along with effective cranial techniques has a combination of the most effective tools that a massage therapist can have.

In the '80's and '90's Craniosacral Therapy became a huge presence in the field of massage thanks to the Upledger Foundation, and they continue to train countless numbers of massage therapists each year in Craniosacral techniques. As with any quality therapy, variations on these techniques have emerged. Thus, there are many licensed massage therapists who are practicing Craniosacral, Craniostuctural, Cranial/Structural and Osteopathic cranial techniques. In teaching my Cranial/Structural soft tissue release seminars, I encounter many questions from licensed massage therapists, who practice a cranial technique, about how and when to integrate these techniques with massage or other bodywork therapies.

Cranial techniques can impact the body in phenomenal ways. One is the re-establishment of homeostasis. Osteopathic doctors applied cranial techniques back in the early 1900's during the flu epidemic that ravaged the U.S. around the time of WWI. It has been documented that these cranial techniques were among the most successful treatments for this flu because they facilitated the healing process by returning patients' bodies to homeostasis. This is just one early example of how cranial techniques have impacted medicine in our world. There are too many other instances to elaborate on in this column, but suffice it to say that there have been many broad applications of cranial techniques with huge success over the years.

The return to homeostasis can look very different from client to client, condition to condition, and technique to technique from infancy to old age. One goal of massage therapy is to support a return to homeostasis for our clients. Massage therapists are able to apply very effective massage techniques to relieve stress, pain, structural imbalance, trauma pain, emotional stress, physical restrictions, or performance restrictions. Using cranial techniques in conjunction with massage techniques will further enhance the process of restoring homeostasis and healing.

What is the basis of cranial techniques? - the mobilization and balancing of the cranial rhythm, which actually becomes a soft tissue energetic technique. The cranial bones serve mainly as handles to release the restrictions in the reciprocal tension membrane and dura, similar to the humerus bone when we move an arm through its ranges of motion to restore motion to a shoulder. The goal is to release the soft tissue restrictions that limit the range of motion, not to move a bone into place. Cranial technique is restoring motion, not positioning, or adjusting, the bones. The restriction of the motion of the cranial bones is held within the soft connective tissue. Restoration of the cranial motion is greatly dependent upon mobilization of the soft tissue, and very similar to the myofascial work that takes place within the field of massage.

Within the field of massage we have many kinds of soft tissue technique. All of it has some degree of mobilization, release of tension, and release of restrictions found in soft tissue. All the soft tissue techniques produce increased range of motion of the joints within existing myofascial holding patterns or structure of the body.

So, with common goals and hands-on manipulation of soft tissue, it is obvious that the application of both cranial techniques and massage techniques is optimum for the massage client's well being.

### **Integration of cranial technique and massage:**

Stress relief and relaxation: When clients are upright and in need of stress relief, I have found that the mobilization of the cranium will lead to a quick release of tension and stress. Consequently, when I have a stressed client on the table, my first therapy application is a cranial technique that produces a significant degree of relaxation and normalization of body functions. This allows the client to be more receptive to further soft tissue manipulation via relaxation massage techniques.

Clients can also be very stressed due to structural imbalances that cause pain and discomfort and tightened muscles restricted into holding patterns. I begin their sessions with the application of a Cranial/Structural technique that will initiate structural balance, increase structural alignment, and relax the soft tissue of the structural holding pattern, all resulting in some significant myofascial unwinding. Additional soft tissue massage at this point will further release: 1) toxins and waste products, ischemia, and inflammation; 2) structural myofascial holding pattern; 3) adhesions, lesions and scar tissue, all producing long lasting stress relief and structural balance.

Pain relief: When a client has significant pain coming into a massage room, they are looking for quick and substantial relief. Pain is a symptom, whether from stress (see above), trauma, structural imbalance, inflammation, or emotions. Pain from trauma has several manifestations. One is the actual pain from the trauma. When a body is in pain, the entire body reacts with tension, structural distortion, and limited motion. This includes the cranium. It only makes sense to use a cranial technique that will remobilize the cranial motion to help remobilize the entire body and specifically the area of trauma. Oftentimes, this immediately reduces the intensity of the pain. If the injury caused a structural imbalance, the healing process and reduction of the symptoms often cannot be complete without rebalancing the structure with both cranial techniques and massage techniques. Again, integrating soft tissue treatments to reduce swelling and inflammation, to further balance the structure, and to release forming scar tissue and adhesions is an optimal treatment for trauma.

Sometimes the pain is actually caused by cranial compression, as is often found with headaches. The remobilizing of the cranial motion releases this compression, the soft tissue of the dura, and the fascia of the neck and shoulders relieving the headache. Additional soft tissue treatment of the musculature of the neck and shoulders makes this a complete treatment.

Pain caused by structural imbalance can be extensive if the imbalance causes disc problems or nerve entrapments. Structural imbalance problems can also be related to hip, knee, foot, and ankle and nerve entrapments of the arm. Initiating a structural change using Cranial/Structural technique at the beginning of the session, and then integrating myofascial unwinding and directed myofascial release techniques to further balance the structure, is a very quick and direct way to reduce the pressure of the nerve entrapment/impingement, joint imbalance or unequal pressure on the disc or vertebral areas.

Many emotional blockages manifest as physical pain. The mobilization of the cranium, either with Craniosacral or Cranial/Structural, can release structures or chronically tightened tissues that block emotional release. Follow this with effective soft tissue releases to the tightened soft tissue, and trapped emotional energy readily releases allowing homeostasis and the end of pain.

At this point, it is necessary to differentiate between Craniosacral and Cranio/Structural. The easiest distinction is Craniosacral seeks to mobilize the cranium within the restrictions of the soft tissue of the cranium and the dura for homeostasis. Cranial/Structural seeks to

release the restrictions of the soft tissue of the cranium and dura, thus releasing the cranial distortion, which repeats itself throughout the body, for structural balancing of the full body. These are the gross and simplified distinctions between the two cranial techniques, and there is much overlapping between the two techniques that I will not go into here.

The scope of this article is very limited due to space, but there are vast possibilities and benefits of using cranial techniques with massage therapy. Hopefully, other cranial therapists will write articles contributing to the absolute wealth of information of the benefits of this integration.

I hope the information in this article will increase your awareness of effective treatment for supporting your clients. Keep up the good massage therapy until we communicate again in the next installment of SET TALK.