

## SET TALK

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### TREATING SENIORS WITH CRANIAL/STRUCTURAL CORE DISTORTION RELEASES

Every Massage Therapist will have the opportunity to work with senior citizens (over 65) in their massage practice. If you haven't prepared for this and don't understand the special conditions of seniors, you may not provide effective quality therapeutic massage.

Before discussing the reasons for treating seniors with Cranial/Structural core distortion releases, there are special considerations that are necessary when working with older clients. If you haven't taken advanced training in working with seniors then you need to brush up on your pathology and medical contraindications. Often medical treatments administered by physicians can result in contraindications for massage. This usually involves medications that seniors take, often prophylactically, to prevent heart attacks and strokes.

Prescription blood thinners are absolutely not safe for the application of massage techniques. Even aspirin can be a contraindication if there are numerous bruises evident on their bodies. When doing your intake interview you must be careful to double check the medications they are on, and update any changes in medications before each subsequent session. If clients are in an Assisted Living Facility, it is a good idea to check with the nursing staff as they have an accurate record of the medications and any other changes that may have taken place in the senior clients' health. However, beware! I have had referrals for massage therapy from medical doctors for clients who are on blood thinners! They don't realize the dangers of combining massage with these medications. Within the massage body of knowledge, blood thinners are a contraindication to massage, and, as a licensed professional, you are ultimately responsible should anything happen.

Now let's look the benefits of Cranial/Structural therapy for seniors. Seniors have had more opportunities to develop problems due to structural collapse. If you look at how structural collapse progresses over a lifetime, you will understand the importance of effective treatment for rehabilitation and pain relief. Structural collapse starts at birth when we enter an environment where we have to support ourselves. Each of us is born with an imbalance in the pelvis where one ilium is rotated anterior and the other posterior. This rotation of the iliums results in a

tipped sacrum which is unable to provide a level base for the spine. Consequently, the spine compensates with a degree of curvature or scoliosis. In the womb, we are supported in amniotic fluid. Once we leave that environment, we have a different gravity affecting our bodies as we are no longer suspended in fluid. Often going through birth, the cranium is compressed and the rest of the body distorts leaving the infant with greater structural distortion.

Through life, many other influences can increase this structural imbalance such as injuries, quick sudden falls, sprains, strains, broken bones, one-sided sports injuries, furniture that doesn't support the body well, and ill-fitting shoes. For seniors, illnesses can weaken their ability to compensate for their already imbalanced structure. Examples of this are severe osteoporosis where the actual bone mass is drastically reduced, and COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) where their vitality is lost. There is additional loss of muscle strength and vitality due to the aging process, multiple surgeries resulting in scar tissue and adhesions, accumulation of emotional stress such as grieving which can be a prominent factor for seniors, along with the constant pull of gravity. It is easy to understand how seniors fall into structural collapse which results in pain and dysfunction throughout the body.

At least 90% of musculoskeletal pain and dysfunction comes from this structural collapse. Rehabilitation is dependent upon restoring structural support to the overall structure. Without restoring support to a collapsed structure the benefits from massage will be lost as soon as the senior client becomes weight bearing.

Cranial/Structural techniques give the massage therapist an extremely powerful tool to move the structure into weight bearing support. The cranium has movement that hinges at the juncture of the sphenoid and occiput known as the Sphenobasilar Synchondrosis (SBS). All of the other cranial bones respond to the movement that flexes and extends at this juncture. Distortion at this juncture also affects all the other cranial bones and their motion. This in turn affects the reciprocal tension membrane, the dura, and the myofascial planes throughout the body.

In addition, the greater wings of the sphenoid bone relate directly with the ASIS of the iliums. The rotational imbalance of the iliums is directly related to the rotational imbalance of the sphenoid bone. The ridges of the rotated occiput relate directly to the rotated PSIS of the iliums and the tipping of the sacrum. This creates an imbalance at the base of the spine leading to spinal curvatures and structural collapse. All of these imbalances are maintained by restrictions in the soft tissue of the cranium in the reciprocal tension

membrane, dura and fascia. More restrictions are found in congestion of the cerebral spinal fluid and energetic system. Also, restrictions in the myofascial planes of the body have additional influence on the cranial motion.

This gives the massage therapist who has been trained in Cranial/Structural therapy a safe and effective technique to release the restrictions of the cranial motion which will address the entire structural collapse of seniors. As these restrictions of the cranial motion at the SBS are released, distortions throughout the structure are released.

Most importantly the rotational distortions of the iliums and sacrum are released creating a level base for the spine providing weight bearing support for the spine. The distortions of the spine begin to unwind which addresses many of the problems the seniors have related to discs and arthritis. This also has a profound effect on the structural collapse found with osteoporosis allowing many clients to regain structural support and reducing the pressure on the edges of the vertebrae where the compression fractures occur. As the spine unwinds, the pressure of the rib cage on the internal organs is released allowing more efficient function. The improved structure also directly affects the legs and the way they support the body, as well as improving many of the imbalances found in the hips, knees, ankles and feet.

Another major advantage of Cranial/Structural therapy is that the body is more receptive to soft tissue work since the unwinding into balance is initiated by the Cranial/Structural techniques. This is extremely important for senior clients who usually already have deteriorating soft tissue which can be atrophied and fragile. After the application of Cranial/Structural techniques it takes less pressure for soft tissue strokes to release restrictions in the myofascial holding patterns and adhesions. Thus the application of soft tissue treatments can be softer, and produce greater results.

Some other benefits for seniors from Cranial/Structural releases are: improved immune system, increased energy, increased mental clarity, decreased frequency of headaches, greater mobility, and improved vitality. When major changes described above can easily be accomplished with Cranial/Structural therapy, the senior client has a chance of regaining improvements that will make the rest of their lives better. They can continue being active and productive in their end years.

#### **CASE STUDY:**

Myrtle, an 84 year-old senior citizen was referred to me with severe osteoporosis that resulted in a hip replacement and multiple compression fractures of the

lumbar and thoracic spine. She also had arthritis of her hands and congestive heart failure. At the time of the referral she was having difficulty maintaining her weight, lost 18 lbs in the last year and weighed just 90 lbs. She had also lost 5 inches of her height due to the collapsed into the scoliotic curvature of osteoporosis. She was in severe pain from a recent compression fracture of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lumbar vertebra and was experiencing almost daily headaches.

There were many challenges with the frailty of her bones and the degree of collapse in her spine. Fortunately, the doctors had not put her on blood thinners so she could receive massage therapy. In her first session the core distortion releases of the cranium were successfully applied resulting in an almost immediate height increase of an inch and a half. Her collapsed rib cage rose out of the collapse so her digestive organs were not as compressed, and she was able to breathe more fully. The Cranial/Structural releases were followed by abdominal soft tissue releases that further raised her rib cage and expanded her breathing. She reported a significant decrease in the pain from the compression fracture in her lower back.

When she presented for her second session she reported only one headache in the week between sessions and was regaining her appetite. She maintained the weight gain, increase in breathing and the pain relief in her low back. The Cranial/Structural releases were repeated with soft tissue treatment of the neck and shoulders. There was an additional height gain of another half inch, and more improvement in her breathing.

Additional sessions reinforced the positive changes and relieved the remaining back pain. She regained her appetite, gained weight and was more mobile and able to lead a more normal life. The doctors stabilized her Congestive Heart Failure and she was able to travel to visit her grandchildren who lived a six hour plane flight away.

Overall the quality of her life dramatically improved even with the osteoporosis and Congestive Heart failure, and she was in minimal pain. Without the Cranial/Structural releases the degree of her improvement would not have been possible.

These Cranial/Structural techniques are taught in one weekend workshops and within the two year SET Training. Until next time, continue your great work!