



Topic:

Craniosacral Therapy and Infant Functioning

Research tells us:

Significant flaws in the ways studies are designed and carried out characterize the available body of research on the use of craniosacral therapy with infants and young children. This raises questions about the accuracy of the reported findings. Scientific research that is carefully designed and conducted is needed before a recommendation can be made about the practice.

Acting on the evidence:

Proceed with caution both when considering whether to pursue craniosacral therapy as a therapeutic intervention for young children with or without developmental disabilities or delays and when interpreting outcomes reported in existing research on the practice.



Value of craniosacral therapy is unclear

Further study is needed before the practice can be recommended as a way to improve the health and development of infants and young children with disabilities or developmental delays

Does the alternative health practice known as craniosacral therapy have beneficial effects on the development of infants and young children, including those with developmental disabilities or delays? Does this type of gentle-touch therapy, in which practitioners manipulate the cranial system—including soft tissue and bones of the head (cranium area), spine (sacral area), and pelvis—produce positive results for children?

The answer is: We don't know. Claims about the benefits of craniosacral therapy are questionable because there are a number of important shortcomings in the ways researchers designed and conducted the studies.

The practice requires further study. This is especially so because some proponents of craniosacral therapy claim their efforts improve nervous-system functioning in ways that remedy all sorts of health-related problems—hyperactivity, Down syndrome, autism, dyslexia, cerebral palsy, breastfeeding difficulties, colic, and ear infection, for example. Families of children with disabilities deserve solid evidence about the effectiveness of craniosacral therapy before availing their children of the practice.

Tracy L. Masiello, Ph.D. and Jennifer Pace, B.A. conducted an analysis of 19 studies of craniosacral therapy for the Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development. Sixty-nine children with and without disabilities were included in the studies they examined. They determined that there was not enough information about the characteristics of the practice, the qualifications of the practitioners, and the reliability and validity of instruments used for assessing the therapeutic outcomes to produce findings useful for parents and practitioners trying to make decisions about possible treatments for their children. Well-designed studies that provide sound information are needed.

Take another look:

Visit www.researchtopractice.info to read or download the complete research synthesis by T. L. Masiello and J. Pace (2005). Influences of craniosacral therapy on the health and development of infants and young children. *Bridges*, 3(3). Copies of the synthesis and of this *Bottomlines* summary are available from Winterberry Press, P. O. Box 2277, Morganton, NC 28680, www.wbpress.com. 828-432-0150 or 800-824-1174.