Craniosacral Therapy as Migraine Treatment

by ALYSSA WINEGARDEN

Craniosacral Therapy

I had my first migraine when I was very young, though I wasn't aware at the time that the white spots dancing in front of my eyes would soon develop into the worst physical pain of my life.

I remember very clearly standing on the playground and thinking it was really fascinating that my friend could hold up 10 fingers and I would only see five. She stood across from me, lifting her hands and asking, "Okay, how many am I holding now?!" And each time, I'd get it wrong and we'd giggle.

The 'white spots' were auras, and auras would later be identified as one of several indications of an impending migraine attack.

My mom picked me up from school that day after the auras turned into a horrible pain that started behind my right eye. The pain was so severe I became violently ill, and when we got home, I attempted to sleep the pain away. My first migraine attack lasted for approximately eight hours.

My next migraine attack wasn't until I was in high school. It started very similarly with auras, however what came next was a terrifying combination of severe pain, numbness in my extremities, speech impairment, and vomiting.

At first I thought I was having a stroke. Then I was convinced I was dying. After having MRIs, CT scans, being appointed a neurologist, and trying several different medications – none of which helped to minimize or prevent my migraines – I felt helpless.

It Got Worse Before it Got Better

In 2010, my first year of college, I started on birth control to regulate my menstrual cycle, which was irregular due to my vegetarian lifestyle. On the fifth day of being on a hormonal birth control pill, I woke up and couldn't focus my eyes. I went back to sleep and woke up several hours later, my eyes were crossed and I couldn't uncross them.

My parents were up north and my sister was sitting downstairs. I crawled out of my bed in a panic and crawled down the stairs, eyes crossed, crying. I can only imagine how terrifying I must've looked. I started experiencing numbness, speech impairment followed, and I still couldn't uncross my eyes.

We called my aunt, who is a registered nurse, and she picked me up and took me to the hospital. I was admitted right away and the doctors ran several tests and performed a neurological evaluation. My doctor told me I was exhibiting symptoms of a minor stroke.

It was after that experience that I realized I couldn't live the way I had been living anymore. The migraines were regular and I was constantly anxious and in fear of not being home when the next migraine would strike.

This fear turned me into a bit of a recluse, until my mom suggested I see Shauna, a retired physiotherapist who had worked on my grandmother and two of my aunts. Though I was skeptical, I was desperate and willing to try anything.

Next page: how craniosacral therapy can help and my results.

How Craniosacral Therapy can Help

Migraines are one of the most mysterious yet prevalent, disabling conditions in the medical community today. As craniosacral therapists will tell you, the key to long-term success is relieving the underlying cause of the migraine.

Shauna explained craniosacral therapy as a gentle and non-invasive approach that focuses on the craniosacral system of the body, including the bones of the cranium – the skull, face and mouth – and extends down the spine to the tailbone.

Small amounts of pressure – typically not exceeding five grams – are applied to specific parts of the craniosacral system to help release and encourage flow of cerebrospinal fluid, cerebrospinal fluid providing nutrients for your brain and spinal cord. Occasionally, due to injury, these pathways get blocked and the flow of fluid can be impaired which can cause back and neck pain as well as migraines.

Craniosacral therapy is performed on a fully-clothed body and can last between 45 minutes to over an hour. Using gentle touch, the craniosacral therapist monitors the rhythm of fluid pulsing through the craniosacral system to detect restrictions and imbalances. If restrictions are detected, the therapist then uses gentle touch to release the fluid, relieving pressure on the brain and spinal cord.

In addition to migraines, craniosacral therapy has been used to relieve a variety of neurological dysfunctions including neck and back pain, jaw dysfunction, chronic fatigue, depression, eye problems, hyperactivity, and central nervous system disorders.

My Results

I saw Shauna three times, each time for a one-hour session. The process was so relaxing and gentle that I found myself dozing at several points. After the three sessions, which took place over the course of two months, I didn’t experience another migraine that year. I was shocked and incredibly happy.

To this day, I still only experience two or three migraines each year. Craniosacral therapy helped me get my life back and I feel incredibly thankful to have found Shauna.

Today, I still see a craniosacral therapist a few times each year to maintain the work Shauna did. If you haven’t tried craniosacral therapy, I would highly recommend it. With alternative treatment methods becoming more prevalent as people try to avoid over-medicating, craniosacral therapy has increased in popularity as both a primary and complementary migraine treatment.

To find a craniosacral therapist near you, check out The Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy Association of North America.