



Have a headache? Let's release it!

Emily Klik, LMT, CST

“Through my years as a craniosacral therapist, I’ve noticed that headaches come in many forms and intensities, with a variety of symptoms, all including discomfort. Just to name a few, there are tension headaches, sinus headaches, inflammation headaches, migraines. They can be triggered by dehydration, stress, anxiety, loud noises, sleep deprivation, allergies, concussion, jaw tension, or even medication. Other contributing factors can include congestion of the inner ears, sinuses, or even the digestive system. There are sacral headaches that stem from trauma to the sacrum or spine, such as a slip and fall or complication from an epidural. A serious bump to the head, or concussion, can manifest many neurological symptoms besides pain and discomfort. Essentially, based on the factors I just listed, most headaches are secondary conditions, and the good news is that craniosacral therapy can address all of them.

What does it mean when a condition is secondary? That the primary underlying issue exists somewhere else in the body and that the headache is a symptom of that primary issue. An example I find frequently is a kind of dull headache that accompanies constipation, aka digestive congestion. This kind of headache is typically a dull overall headache and follows abdominal bloating and constipation. In a craniosacral session, I would address this by first releasing the soft tissue of the abdomen (mesentery), then mobilizing the bones of the cranium. Normally the headache would start to dissipate during the abdominal work, and clear up completely by the time the cranial bones are mobilized. In life, most people would elect to take an over-the-counter pain medication for the headache which may temporarily relieve the headache. Unfortunately, most OTC pain medications also contribute to constipation. This means that once the medication wears off, that the headache will return full force or worse, because the digestive system becomes further irritated by the OTC pain medication, thus driving the headache pattern back into action. Becoming a vicious cycle.

Another common secondary headache I encounter is when a physical restriction in the spine or sacrum radiates into the cranium. This happens quite easily because the connective tissue that surrounds the spine is continuous up through the neck, into the head. It’s as if someone was pulling on the end of your sleeve at your wrist, and you feel the fabric tighten all the way up to your shoulder. In a circumstance like this, I address the restriction in the spine or sacrum first, then mobilize the bones of the skull. This exact scenario affected me personally many years ago, when I suffered with migraines that lasted 7-10 days at a time and were not diminished by medication or other types of therapy. At the time, I thought I would simply have to live with them until a friend told me “You should try craniosacral therapy for your migraines”. I had nothing to lose, and so tried a few sessions. In the first session, the therapist placed her hands

on my cranium for a few minutes, then shifted her hands to my low back and sacrum. At the time, I remember feeling a bit confused because my low back and sacrum were not in pain. However, within minutes I felt a sense of clenching in the middle of my head releasing, despite the fact that her hands were not in contact with my head. By the end of that first session, my screaming migraine had decreased to a mild dull headache, which was a vast improvement. I rose from the massage table asking what happened, and the therapist replied, "That is craniosacral therapy, you had a sacral migraine".

That lesson has inspired me to consider headache a full body issue, and to seek the underlying issue of every headache I encounter. For headaches triggered by stress or anxiety, I address the structures of patients' bodies that tend to harbor stress. Patients who see me may remember a question on my intake form "where do you hold or harbor stress?". This question is what initiates that discovery process. Many people have an idea where stress is held. For some, it can be difficult to answer this question, because the answer might be "everywhere". Blessedly, by palpating and assessing the craniosacral rhythm, I can find areas that harbor stress that the patient may not be aware of. This shows up in the craniosacral rhythm with a localized diminishing, or low amplitude, and typically corresponds to areas of the body that have pain, injury, tension, scar tissue etc. For example, stress held in the stomach will cause the craniosacral rhythm in the stomach area to appear lessened, or absent. Or if stress is held in the lungs, or shoulders, it will show up as a diminished rhythm in those areas. No matter where stress is held, it can be released with craniosacral bodywork, followed by mobilizing the cranial bones, leading to a complete release of the stress related headache for total relaxation and relief. For information about how the craniosacral rhythm works, see my earlier article describing it.

Another common headache stems from jaw tension. The jaw is the strongest joint in the human body and can generate significant force, even in toddlers. When the jaw is clenched, there are a few muscles in the face and head that can become chronically tight (masseter and temporalis mainly), which compresses the bones of the skull over time. This can lead to sinus pressure, pain in the face, tension in the jaw and neck, and you guessed it... headache. This is one of the few situations where the cause of the headache is actually in the head. By releasing the jaw, the muscles associated with clenching, the nerve pathways that innervate the tense muscles, and the bones of the face and sinuses, all of the symptoms can be relieved. A comment I hear frequently after a session like that is "I didn't know my head and face could feel this good and relaxed".

If you suffer from headaches, I invite you to try a few sessions of craniosacral therapy. Let's find out where your headaches come from, gently release them, and relax you. You deserve to be free from the pain of headaches.

©February2022, Emily Klik, LMT, CST is a CranioSacral Therapist at Ommani. She sees clients who are free of symptoms on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Call our office at 262.695.5311 to schedule an appointment.