

# WHAT IS Equine Cranio Sacral Therapy?

**Sue Newport** explains how she has used it to help her horse.

**C**ranio Sacral Therapy (CST) is a sensitive, non-manipulative therapy that is holistic, natural and effective. It encourages the body to heal itself by triggering its natural self-healing mechanism, thus improving and maintaining health.

The cranio sacral system is made up of the bones of the cranium (skull), the sacrum (base of the spine), the spinal column, the spinal cord and the membranes encasing it, and the cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) that flows up and down the spinal cord and around the brain, nourishing, lubricating and protecting them. Within this system is a motion which is expressed in the CSF as a tide-like ebb and flow called the cranial rhythm. It can be felt anywhere on the body and is also expressed by all structures in the body which follow their own pattern of movement as the cells expand and contract. This motion underlies all other rhythms such as breathing and heart-beat and is considered to be produced by the life force which gives life to everything on the planet. It also carries a basic intelligence, much deeper than our thought processes, which provides a deep unwavering principle, an essential blueprint for health. This is contained in each cell and is always available, however dire the situation.

The horse's body, and our own, is self-healing and self-regulating, having all the substances required to maintain health providing a free flow of life-force is available. However, the capacity of the body to heal stressful experiences or trauma (physical, psychological, toxic or genetic) can become overwhelmed, making it impossible for it

to return to its natural way of functioning. In these circumstances the body seeks the most efficient balance; it contracts and locks the stressful forces into its cells where they are "stored" as a memory to limit any further damage that might be caused. This limits the ability of the cells to "breathe" and has the potential to significantly alter organ and tissue physiology, setting up dysfunctional patterning in the body which produces "dis-ease". Over time flexibility and spontaneity of movement are lost. Nutritional uptake and behaviour can also be affected and if the dysfunctional patterns are not resolved they work their way through the body, setting it up for more pain, behavioural change and limitation of movement.

The essential aim of CST is to assist the re-expression of life force in the tissues which have become stagnant and fragmented. This is done by the therapist's hands facilitating the best possible environment to allow the horse's body to follow its own sequence of letting go of trapped forces. In this way every step towards health is a permanent change which supports and integrates individual wholeness. The visible signs of horses "releasing" during a session may include licking, chewing, yawning, shifting weight on hind legs, sighing, stomach gurgling, changes in breathing, softening of eyes and ears, rapid movement in body or limbs if the horse is lying down, or in individual muscles. Almost any condition can be helped by raising the life force and enabling the body to correct any misalignment and malfunction within its systems.

In the spring last year my retired 30-year-old

Welsh Cob had his routine visit from the dentist, and some time afterwards I noticed that he was having difficulty eating his food. His mouth was checked and showed no obvious problems and in time his chewing improved. At the end of the summer he started rubbing the top of his neck, the poll, shoulder (all on the left side), under his neck and chin and his buttocks. In January, when the farrier came, he was unable to balance when his right fore-leg was lifted. At this point he showed no signs of lameness but was a little stiff and grumpy at times. I started to give him CST and felt that his temporo mandibular joint (TMJ), the jaw joint, just in front of the base of the ears and the atlanto axial joint between the first and second cervical vertebrae at the top of the neck were out of alignment. In addition, there was tension in the soft tissue running from his jaw and face down the neck into the shoulder and along the back into the lumbar and sacral area. I realised that the rubbing was due to discomfort in his body and he was relieving it with pressure. He was also showing me where the problem areas were.

These areas of tension are indicative of temporo mandibular dysfunction. Once the tightness in the muscles, tendons and ligaments of the TMJ mechanism released, so did the compensatory patterns in the rest of the body. His chewing improved as the relaxed TMJ muscles allowed proper teeth contact. I now ask my dentist to release the speculum (used to keep the mouth open) more frequently, and after his visit I give my horses a CST treatment.

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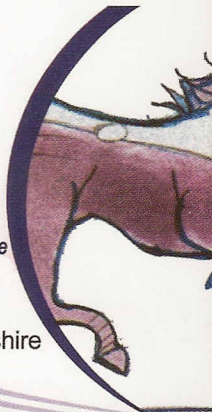
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