



# Equine CranioSacral Work

## An Introduction to the Physiological and Intuitive Understanding

By Maureen Rogers

### What is CranioSacral Work?

CranioSacral Work combines sensitive and hands-on bodywork with meditative use of the inner eye and inner ear. Techniques are drawn from three traditions: osteopathy, energy work and Taoism. A supremely gentle approach, it is a way of "doing non-doing." It honors both the physiological understanding of how things happen and the intuitive perceptions of how things really are. Equine CranioSacral Work is very effective in the treatment of certain conditions of the horse. The technique seems to work very deeply in the body. The reason for this is because one is working directly with the central nervous system.

### A Brief History

CranioSacral Work, which originated from the work of osteopath Dr. William Sutherland, DO in the early 1900's was originally called 'craniopathy' and was derived from osteopathy. It was later called 'CranioSacral Therapy' by Dr. John Upledger, DO from the Upledger Institute, and 'Visionary CranioSacral Work' by Dr. Hugh Milne, from The Milne Institute. Now the work is being taken over to the equine world with much success.



### The Equine CranioSacral System – "The Core Link"

The CranioSacral system of the horse is made up of several parts: the bones of the cranium or the head, the sacrum or tailbone, and the spinal column. CranioSacral work traditionally specialized in the head, spine, and sacrum, but it is not limited to those areas, nor is it limited to the physical. All of the following are considered to make up the "Core Link." The spinal column is protected by what is called the dural tube, which encases the spinal column. The dural tube attaches at the foramen magnum, meaning 'large window' in Latin. This 'window' allows the spinal column to exit the skull through the large opening in the occipital bone, which forms the base of the skull. The dural tube then attaches to cervical vertebra 2, or C2, and free-floats through the length of the spinal column until it attaches again at the second sacral segment of the sacrum, thus attaching the head to the hind end, or the occiput to the sacrum.



Cerebral Spinal Fluid (CSF) is produced in four ventricles (a series of connecting cavities) of the brain. The job of CSF is to nourish the brain with nutrients. It also acts as a protective mechanism for the brain and is a lubricant for the tissue. CSF has the same pH balance as embryonic fluid and salt water. The human body contains 150 milliliters of CSF; a horse has about 200 milliliters. Equine CranioSacral Work uses sensitive and exact finger pressure. Pressures are exceedingly gentle and there is no bone manipulation. The measurable amplitude of the cranial wave (a discreet, muscular pulsation de-

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livered by the cranial bone) is between 40 microns to 1.5 mm. in movement according to different authorities, less than half the thickness of dental paper. The movement cannot be seen, but can be palpated in a meditative state. The practitioner's or healer's challenge is thus to sense, listen to, and finally to interpret a very discreet movement. The cranial rhythm (the rhythm of the cranial waves) is said to cycle between 8-14 cycles per minute and can be palpated anywhere on the body. The cranial rhythm is different from that of the heartbeat and the respiratory rate.

### Connecting Head to Tail

Twists, similar to that of a telephone cord, can occur in the dural tube affecting the cranial wave and creating an imbalance in the horse's body. A head injury can affect the hind end and a hind end injury can affect the head of the horse. The body then stops functioning optimally, affecting the horse's performance, behavior, and sometimes its nutritional intake. Sutures, or joints between the cranial bones, allow for movement and help disperse the impact of a blow when an injury to the head occurs. Cranial bones, like all bones, are alive, with a significant amount of blood supply making them pliable. If they weren't, they would shatter on impact, like a china plate. When an injury or trauma occurs, it gets 'stuck' in the tissue of the horse and is stored in the cell memory of the tissue until released. Dr. Upledger calls this injury an 'energy cyst'. Another term used by some is a 'psychotic corner'. Dr. Hugh Milne refers to it as an 'archaic wound'.

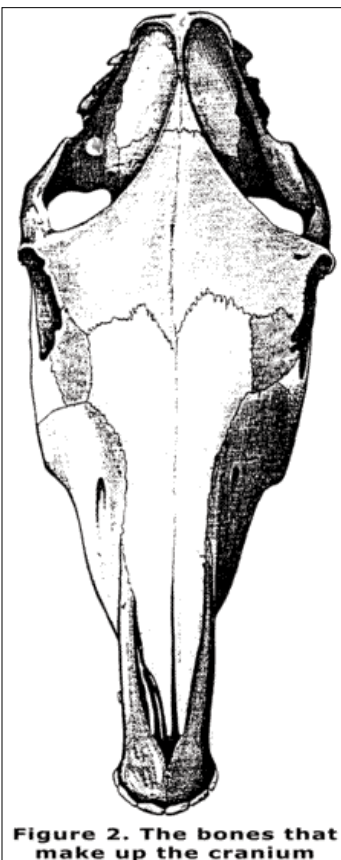


Figure 2. The bones that make up the cranium

A CranioSacral practitioner is taught to sense any restrictions in the CranioSacral system. By palpating the cranial wave on different areas of the horse, a practitioner can tell where there is healthy movement or lack of movement. This is similar to an acupuncturist palpating the flow of energy through meridian pathways. The practitioner or healer learns specific hands-on techniques to palpate the cranial wave anywhere on the horse's body. Also learned are specific hands-on contacts for cranial bones and the bones of the pelvis to treat different conditions of the horse, thus assisting the body to correct itself. The body has an incredible self-healing mechanism, and in the Equine CranioSacral Work, trained practitioners are taught to listen to what the horse needs. The horse's restrictions can come from a physical trauma of any kind, including chemical, as well as an emotional or spiritual trauma. Each affects the other.

Practitioners watch for signs of the tissue releasing. Signs of a horse releasing during a session may be licking and chewing, yawning, lowering of the head, shifting the weight around on the back feet, stomach gurgling, a change in the breath as in a deep sigh, and softening of the eyes and ears. By releasing these restrictions in the cranial system, healthier function and optimal movement can return to the equine ath-

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### Treatable Conditions

Most horses could benefit from an Equine CranioSacral session, especially if the horse has experienced a head injury, or any kind of roll over, either in a horse trailer or from being cast in a stall. The different conditions that CranioSacral Work seems to work well with include TMJ (Temporal Mandibular Joint Dysfunction), which some of us may relate to, results of head trauma, asymmetrical eyes (usually found in young race horses), emotional problems and behavioral problems, results of physical abuse, parrot mouth, hind end lameness, colic, tinnitus (ringing in the ears), head shaking, sinus or breathing problems, blocked tear ducts, cribbing, birth traumas, prematurity in foals, castration, and pre-parturition (when pregnant mares are about to give birth), just to name a few.

TMJ Temporal Mandibular Joint Dysfunction is a condition in both humans and horses. Specifically, it is a condition of the TMJ where the mandible or jaw is not free-floating in the joint capsule of the temporal bone, the region by the ear. The muscles around the joint have become tightened due to stress, physical injury, or trauma. TMJ becomes more complicated in horses than in people because horses have movable ears.

TMJ affects the horse's performance, the ability for proper nutritional intake, and mental and emotional well-being.

### Working with Acute Conditions Vs. Chronic

Equine CranioSacral Therapy is effective in treating both acute and chronic injuries and conditions in the horse. Number of treatments needed will vary from horse to horse for the specific condition. Other modalities that work well with the CranioSacral Work are massage, chiropractic, acupuncture, and acupressure, and equine dentistry. Combing this with playtime and grazing. Keep your horse living longer and healthier by preventive care.

Always consult with your veterinarian. Equine CranioSacral Work by no means replaces professional veterinary care. It is important to work with people who are properly trained in Equine CranioSacral Work.

Some of the information in this article was adapted from the book, *The Heart of Listening - A Visionary Approach to CranioSacral Work* by Hugh Milne.

### About the Author

Maureen Rogers is a licensed massage therapist who has studied CranioSacral Work extensively. She has studied with, and currently assists, Hugh Milne in teaching Visionary CranioSacral Work with The Milne Institute. She is a graduate of the Utah College of Massage Therapy. Her love and passion for animals has led her to take her work from the human to the equine world. Maureen holds a Bachelors of Science degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, and is a founding member of the non-profit organization, The International Alliance for Animal Therapy and Healing.



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