

It's all in your head

It is conventional wisdom to think that the skull is a rigid and fixed structure. This assumes that there is no motion in the skull except for where the skull meets the jaw and the vertebrae of the neck. However, there is an idea that was proposed by an osteopath named Dr. Sutherland at the turn of the 20th century. He stated that there is a natural pulsating movement of the skull at a rate of 10-14 cycles per minute. This pulsation is independent of breathing and heart rate and can be sensed by light pressure applied to the skull. The skull, even though rigid, is composed of 8 cranial and 12 facial bones and has 36 muscles attached to it. Any changes in the relationship of the joints between the bones or excess tension of the muscles, can have a significant impact on one's health.

The skull is postulated to have effects on our health through impingement of the cranial nerves, alterations of the functioning of the jaw joint and changes to the outflow of hormones from the brain. Some of the reasons for altered cranial motion involve unresolved birth/childhood trauma that can happen with the use of forceps or falls that happen as little ones learn how to walk. Even as an adult we can traumatize our skulls in rear end car accidents where our heads hit the head rest or just chronic postures like sleeping on our stomach and chewing on one side. Another cause is when excess force is applied to the jaw during dental work necessary to treat tooth decay, or because full or partial dentures are not properly refitted over time and the teeth don't occlude properly with each bite.

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There are 12 cranial nerves on each side of the skull and they are special nerves that come directly from the brain stem and not the spinal cord like the rest of the nerves. These special nerves go to our sense organs like the eyes to see through, but also to the muscles that move the eye. These nerves pass out of the cranial bowl to the outside through holes in the skull and it is at this point where they can become pinched and this can lead to altered perception like double vision or loss of smell or reduced hearing. By returning normal function to the skull the nerves can be unpinched and normal function can be resumed and symptoms can resolve.

Altered occlusion or the contact of your teeth either through fillings/crowns or tooth extraction or clenching/grinding can change how the jaw moves in relation to the skull as well as to the neck and this can have impact on physical symptoms throughout the body by its influence on balance and coordination. There has been a great deal of interest in professional sports like soccer and football on TMJ position and its impact on coordination and athletic performance for example.

The brain has a little part of it that protrudes down into the bottom of the bowl of the skull called the pituitary gland. The skull has formed a cup that encases this gland in bone and tough membrane in the centre of the skull. This cup is thought to rock back and forth with cranial pulsation, acting to milk the pituitary gland. This gland releases hormones that effect most of the hormone producing glands of the body. Altered or blocked movement of the cranium can effect hormonal outflow from this skull-gland relationship. So if there are multiple hormone issues it would be worth having the cranium assessed for possible involvement.

To determine if the cranium is involved in you health issues, a thorough history is taken and an exam is done with

particular attention focused on the functioning of the cranial nerves, movement of the jaw-head-neck and the tone and mass of the muscles of the head, face and neck. This exam/history would provide enough information to determine if cranial therapy would benefit you.

Chiropractic can indirectly improve cranial function through the correction of posture to align the head and neck. This reduces many of the abnormal muscular forces on the cranium from poor posture, which can improve many symptoms. Once that is accomplished, a chiropractor who is versed in cranial therapy can further target the relationship of the muscular attachments from the jaw to the skull and the muscles of the cranium. Gentle manipulation can also be applied to the sutures of the skull as well that can have profound effect on the muscles throughout the body.

If you're suffering from migraine headaches, loss of smell, visual changes, hormonal imbalances or if you have had major dental work done, you might be suffering from imbalances and restrictions of the muscles and joints of the skull that could benefit from chiropractic and cranial therapy.



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