



Collaborative Navigation of Your Health & Wellness

7 Tips to Enhance Your CST Experience

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Congratulations on making yourself a priority by scheduling your CST appointment!

Many of us find it hard to invest in ourselves because it takes a commitment of time and resources. As you approach your first appointment, the next step is to make sure that you get the most of your session both on the table and afterward. What I share with you is from my personal experience of receiving the work and what I have learned from my clients over the last twenty years.

First and foremost, leave yourself a little time after your session has ended to ground and reorient yourself before popping right back into your busy life. Some of my clients who have a flexible schedule will make sure they have a couple of hours afterward to process the session; some will even nap!

1. Breathing

Throughout CST sessions I'll observe my clients' breathing patterns, which gives me an indication of how relaxed they are (or not!). I also pay attention to my own breath to ensure that I'm staying relaxed and present. It's common to take in a big breath and sigh during sessions; these breaths often coincide with the tissues' letting go of a holding pattern or tension.

Sometimes, breath has a story all its own. For example, I had a client who started taking shallow, rapid breaths midway through a session. When I checked in with her to make sure she wasn't feeling overwhelmed, she said that she was familiar with this breathing pattern. She associated this rapid breathing with feeling anxious, along with being really warm, and then she'd usually burst into tears

and spiral into a feeling of overwhelm. However, she was surprised to notice that she felt relaxed on the table even though her breathing was rapid. I encouraged her to stay with those short breaths, as I could feel the heat her body created help her tissues to open and relax. My client and I were fascinated that her body chose that breathing pattern to give her tissues the activation they needed to let go of their holding.

There are times when you might experience discomfort as your therapist works on an area that is tightly held. One common place that holds a lot of tension is the base of the neck, where we have a thick layer of muscle that protects that vulnerable spot. The technique used to release the tension often gives a feeling people describe as “intense” or “a good pain.” When this happens, I encourage clients to pay particular attention to their exhales, inviting their bodies to let go of whatever tension they no longer need.

Some clients feel that it’s suddenly easier to breathe during their sessions, particularly through their diaphragms. They can feel the air moving through their bodies from the inside. This can be a really exciting new sensation! I encourage them to take careful note of this change and then spend some time at home afterward observing their breathing, paying attention to the feeling of their breath moving. Breath-awareness practices, such as pranayama in yoga, are also useful both on the table and after. I’ve personally found it useful in my own sessions.

2. Movement

I often feel the need to move when I receive CST, and I follow that impulse, knowing that my therapist will support me as I do. Allowing your body to move into a particular position can be very helpful in guiding your body to release a long-held tension pattern. This spontaneous movement is one way to help your body access its innate ability to heal. Moving during CST can make you feel vulnerable, but I encourage you to follow any urges that arise and to find the safety to do so. You are in control, and you always have the choice to stop. On



a practical note, remember that the tables are narrow; if you find yourself precariously close to the edge, move back to a safe place in the middle of the table and you will drop back into your session again. And with that said don’t worry if you never feel an impulse to move, we all have many different ways to access our body’s wisdom.

Moving is a good way of continuing your process after a session, as well. A practice called continuum movement, founded by Emilie Conrad, is very helpful in enhancing your ability to find and follow your body’s impulses. Continuum movement explores how bodies move when there are no demands

placed on them. You use breath and sounds to vibrate through tissue and loosen restrictions, or “soften the inhibitors.” Then the body can move as it wants, rather than having to move to perform a task. Moving in new ways or in any manner outside of habitual patterns can create profound change.

I've always been able to release whatever's going on for me most easily in water, including receiving CST sessions in a pool, lake or ocean. Because of my love for water, it is a great medium for me to continue processing a CST session. On land, yoga or any kind of mindful movement practice can be a beneficial way to process after CST work, especially a home practice. That way, you can choose poses that feel right and stay in them as long as you want.

During my sessions with clients who practice yoga, when we feel areas of the body opening up, we will discuss the yoga poses that address the same muscle group. For example, if we feel the hip adductors (the muscles on the inside of the thigh) open, we discuss a “seated forward fold.” One client said, “I could not believe the difference in my adductor in my next yoga class. I felt no holding or tightness, when before I always felt like it might snap in a seated forward fold.” In the quiet time after a CST session, the yoga pose called *viparita karani* is very helpful for many people. In this position, you simply lie on your back with your legs resting up on the wall in front of you.



Even taking a relaxing walk after a session can be a great way to integrate the work. There may be some open space nearby where you can hike or sit in the peace and quiet of the outdoors. You can take a nice stroll around your neighborhood or move slowly through your backyard.

3. Sound

Similar to the feeling of wanting to move your body, you may have the impulse to make a sound at some point during your CST session. It can take courage to do so, especially in front of somebody else! Just know that your therapist will support you in whatever you choose. I'll often make these sounds along with my clients, to help alleviate any embarrassment they might feel. The kind of sound I've found most helpful is one that sounds like “ohm” or “voom,” but any sound that comes to you is fine.

Sounds create a vibration you can feel in your body, creating openness and helping bring a sense of calm. They're particularly useful when you're feeling overwhelmed.

Words may come to you that you'll feel the need to say out loud. This can happen when working anywhere in the body, but I've noticed it most often when opening tissues in the throat and mouth.

Sometimes a song may spontaneously come into your head, and it'll feel good to sing it or have it sung to you. While not all therapists can carry a tune (one of those therapists being me), we're usually pretty game to try!

Even if you don't use sound during your session, you may find it helpful afterward. Whether you use nonsense sounds or whole words, loudly or softly, the privacy of the car is a good place to make noise! I've found singing along to kirtan (a call-and-response form of singing) particularly helpful after a mouth-work session. One client told me that after a session in which we had focused on opening her neck and throat, she noticed much greater ease in her body at choir practice the following week. She felt the newfound opening in her throat brought even more enjoyment to her singing, and she was able to maintain this spaciousness through her regular rehearsals.

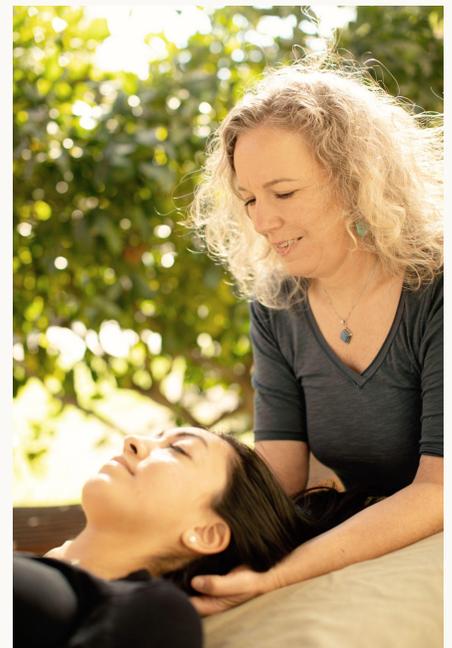
4. Imagery

It is not uncommon to have a scene or picture come into your awareness during your session. This may help deepen your understanding of what you're working with. If an image appears for you, it can be helpful to regularly check in with it afterward. As an example, consider a client of mine who had intense bladder pain. When I asked her if there was anything we could bring into her bladder that would help with its healing process—a color, temperature, or any other quality—she said, “A cool blue gel.” We visualized bringing this into her bladder, and she had no pain in her bladder or urethra at the end of the session. Now, as part of her daily practice, she continues to envision this gel, usually as she lies in bed at night before going to sleep.

This method of using our imagination is a way of accessing our intuitive wisdom. The first few times can feel awkward, and you may feel some self-doubt. But there is valuable information to be gained from engaging with your unique inner imagery.

A good friend shared with me some of what she saw in one of her most memorable and powerful sessions: “I saw the image of a huge keychain, with hundreds of keys—I realized that I was trying to find the right key for every situation, to make myself ‘fit.’ I then met one of my guides, who taught me to dance; subsequently, the keys transformed into a tambourine, which I danced with, feeling a sense of fitting in just as I am, and celebrating that. Now whenever I see that keychain in my mind's eye, I realize I'm trying to fit in or fix a situation, and I'm reminded that I simply need to be myself.”

5. Dreams



Dreams can be seen as a way to access your unconscious mind, and many believe that you can find meaning and solutions in them. Clients often report that symptoms and symptom-related dreams show up just before a session as if the body is highlighting what needs to be worked on.

Clients have described dreams to me during a session. Fortunately, I haven't needed to offer an analysis, as they've been able to find their own answers as the session unfolds.

During one, a client came in and described to me the dream she'd had the night before, in which a tigress had appeared. We began the session at her right pelvis, and she asked what color the chakra was in that area. When I told her it was orange, she said, "This is what the tigress was showing me. It's where I have fear. When I was terrified of opening up my own company 20 years ago, I had my right ovary removed; and now I'm afraid to take my next career step. The tigress is a sign for me to have courage." The information was streaming out of her. As she talked, I noticed her right sacroiliac soften and open. There was a new sense of space in her pelvis, and I invited her to feel into that sensation. She left with a renewed sense of purpose, willing to take the next step in her career.

It's common to have deep, restorative sleep after CST, and to have interesting dreams. Write down any images you remember when you wake up. I've found it useful to go back and reread what I wrote a few weeks later; they always make a lot more sense to me than when I wrote them down, though I can't say why.

6. Journaling



Some people love to write. But even if you don't think of yourself as a writer, journaling can be helpful as a way to express your thoughts, dreams and emotions. Remember that this writing is just for you, not for anyone else to read.

Journaling was not something that I was drawn to growing up, but I have learned to enjoy it and have found it very beneficial. You can write down descriptions of your CST sessions, and often as you write, your understanding of your experience deepens. If you've done a lot of intense emotional work, your journal is a safe place to put it; you can read through it again when the emotions are not as raw and increase your understanding of what you are working with.

Some of my clients who journal regularly will access information during CST work that they later explore further with a talk therapist. Some people bring in their journals when they see me because they like to write down information and impressions as soon as possible before they forget.

You can also use writing to help formulate your intentions when you prepare for your CST sessions. The scope of your questions can be cast wide. Questions to consider include: What results would I like? Is there an area in my body that needs relief? What pattern of pain can I gain more insight into? Is there a reason my pain shows up at a particular time or place? Is this issue connected to a past event?

I always encourage people to take some quiet time with themselves after a session, to check-in and notice any new sensations. This is a great time to write down your experience, what you noticed, and any interesting thoughts that arose during the session. Your body is still actively working on a session for at least 24 hours afterward, so this reflective time is a way to capitalize on the process. You may find that writing helps your body to continue softening and releasing. It's not uncommon to experience new emotions and sensations as you write.

7. Drawing

If you're more inclined to draw than write, you can use that medium to help continue your process after CST. A clear image may come to you during your session, compelling you to draw it. Some clients see amazingly vivid colors during a session, and drawing or painting these colors is a way of continuing their process. Give yourself permission to follow your impulses.

Once, after seeing an image in a session, the impulse to draw came to me. I had to go out and buy a bunch of art supplies because it's something I never do! Interestingly, I knew exactly what kind of oil pastels and paper I wanted. Drawing was an incredibly powerful process for me, and one that took me by surprise. It gave me a sense of being in charge of how I dealt with a childhood experience when at the time I had no power. I even surprised myself with my artistic talents and the fact that I was able to successfully convey my imagery.