



OSTEOPATHY: Babies and children

Osteopathy is an effective and natural approach to healthcare for all life stages. Osteopaths treat babies and children for a variety of common complaints, and to ensure healthy postural development.

Can osteopathy help my child?

Many common problems suffered by babies and children can be treated effectively with osteopathy.

Problems often suffered by babies:

- crying and irritability, especially when lying down.
- feeding difficulties.
- sickness, colic and wind.
- sleep disturbances.

Problems often suffered by older children:

- musculo-skeletal problems.
- susceptibility to infections and a depleted immune system.
- ear infection, sometimes with a loss of hearing and 'glue ear'.
- sinus and dental problems, with a constantly blocked or runny nose.
- behavioural problems and learning difficulties, including poor concentration, fidgeting, difficulty in sitting still and hyperactivity.
- headache, other aches and pains.
- asthma and vulnerability to chest infections.

Osteopathy can also help children suffering from cerebral palsy or Down's Syndrome.

What is osteopathy?

- Osteopathy recognises that much of the pain and disability we suffer stems from abnormalities in our body's structure and function.
- Osteopaths diagnose and treat problems with muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints to help the body's natural healing ability.
- Treatment involves gentle, manual techniques - easing pain, reducing swelling and improving mobility. Often, this involves manipulation which can result in an audible 'crack' which is simply the sound of gas bubbles popping in the fluid of the joints.
- Osteopathy does not involve the use of drugs or surgery.

Could my child suffer an adverse reaction to osteopathy?

Often, after treatment, the baby or child is very relaxed and sleeps well. Others have a burst of energy, and then have a good night's sleep. Occasionally children feel unsettled, but this is a temporary situation that happens when mechanical changes are occurring, and only lasts for a day or two.

At what age should my child be treated?

Children of any age can benefit from osteopathy. It is never too early to start, and for best results treatment should begin before the age of five. Early treatment reduces hindrances to growth and limits the severity of any developing learning difficulty.

Osteopathy for babies and toddlers

Many of the problems that babies and children suffer are caused before, during and immediately after birth, and the child may be left with uncomfortable stresses within its head and body. These stresses can lead to problems such as suckling and latching-on difficulties, irritability, colic, wind and disturbed sleep patterns. Toddlers may suffer from difficulties with mobility and play, and they may sit, crawl and walk early, seeking movement to relieve physical discomfort. Sleep patterns are disturbed, teething may be uncomfortable and head banging or pulling at the hair may occur.

Osteopathic treatment can bring about significant improvement in these cases, and has particular success in treating the problems suffered by premature babies. These babies inevitably suffer stresses and trauma during birth and then further stress from the equipment that needs to be used to stabilise their condition.

Osteopathy for children and teenagers

Distortions to the head can continue to hinder the growth and development of a child's brain as it grows older. The child's behaviour may be volatile, and they may have problems with co-ordination and physical development. They may be vulnerable to chronic ear infections, glue ear, headaches, growing pains and stomach aches. They may be habitual mouth breathers, and suffer from developmental problems such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and attention deficit and

hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The child's posture may suffer too, with the head being held on one side, or one shoulder held higher than the other.

During the teenage years, the body frame undergoes a number of changes. Problems may occur because of an exaggerated spinal curve or because of mechanical changes that occur through osteochondritis – a self-limiting condition that causes a distortion of the bone. Other problems are caused by sporting and recreational activities that carry the risk of sprains and strains.

If these problems are left undiagnosed and untreated they can worsen in later life. Osteopaths can help the body frame adjust to the postural demands made on it. By analysing, treating and managing problems associated with growth, osteopaths make a major contribution to ensuring that young people stay fit and healthy.

Osteopathy in action

Alex is a boy of 12 who suffered from regular and severe headaches, causing him to miss at least a day a week from school. Medication helped to reduce the intensity but not the frequency of the headaches. On examination by an osteopath, Alex's posture was found to be the primary cause of the headaches. He had flat feet and his knees were locked back and held together. He had relatively weak abdominal muscles and stronger back muscles, and threw his weight forward into a sway-back posture. Osteopathic treatment helped improve and develop his posture so that it would support him as he grew. Alex now suffers only occasional headaches, which don't usually require medication or time off school.

Alice is two and until recently suffered from hearing loss. She consistently failed hearing tests from the age of eight months and suffered from nasal congestion. Osteopathic examination found tightness through the base of her skull, face and upper cervical spine. This was leading to a reduction of drainage of the naso-pharynx and poor functioning of the Eustachian tube. Osteopathic treatment reduced this compression and improved the mechanical functioning of the upper neck. Alice's hearing improved significantly after only two treatment sessions.

Baby James cried all the time. He was constantly hungry but couldn't feed for more than a few minutes without getting distressed. His birth had been easy but very fast, causing his head to be cone-shaped and the area around his right eye to be bruised. An osteopath found that James couldn't move his jaw in a correct manner as there was restriction of the temporal bone and cranial base. This meant that he couldn't open his mouth wide enough to latch on or suckle effectively. Treatment to the base of his head allowed the jaw joint to move in the correct way. There was immediate improvement after the first treatment session, and James was feeding easily after the second.

Visiting an osteopath

On your first visit, and before examination begins, the osteopath will discuss and record your child's medical history in detail. You will then normally be asked to remove some of your child's clothing so that a series of observations and biomechanical assessments can be made. This will allow a full diagnosis of the problem and will enable the osteopath to tailor a treatment plan to your child's needs.

The osteopath will then apply a highly developed sense of touch to identify points of weakness or excessive strain throughout the body. Further investigations may include an x-ray or blood test.

Your osteopath should make your child feel at ease and tell you what is happening throughout your consultation. You should ask questions if you have any concerns. If further medical treatment is needed the osteopath may contact your doctor, with your permission.

How much does osteopathy cost?

You do not need a referral from a GP to see an osteopath. The majority of osteopaths work in private practice so you may choose to approach a practitioner directly and pay for treatment. Fees range from £25 to £50 and above for a single session, depending upon the location of the practice and experience of the osteopath. Typically between two and six treatment sessions are needed, though this varies according to the age of the child and severity of the problem.

An increasing number of osteopaths work alongside GPs, so it may be possible for your doctor to refer your child to an osteopath on the NHS. It may also be possible to claim for a course of osteopathy if you have private health insurance policy. Check with your insurance provider to confirm the available level of cover and to find out whether you require a referral from a GP or specialist. All insurance companies have help lines to explain your benefits and methods of claiming.

Osteopathy and patient protection

Patients consulting an osteopath have the same safeguards and rights as when consulting a doctor or dentist. Osteopathy is an established system of diagnosis and treatment, recognised by the British Medical Association as a distinct clinical discipline.

Under the Osteopaths Act of 1993, osteopathy was accorded statutory recognition, and the title "osteopath" protected by law. In the UK it is now a criminal offence to describe oneself as an osteopath unless registered with the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC).

The GOsC regulates, promotes and develops the profession, maintaining a Statutory Register of those entitled to practise. Practitioners on the Register meet the highest standards of safety and competency. They have provided proof of good health, good character and have professional indemnity insurance.

Osteopathic training is demanding and lengthy, and a recognised qualification is only available from osteopathic educational institutions accredited by the GOsC. Trainee osteopaths study anatomy, physiology, pathology, biomechanics and clinical methods during a four or five year honours degree programme. Such wide-ranging medical training gives osteopaths the skills to diagnose conditions when osteopathic treatment is not advisable, and the patient must be referred to a GP for further investigation.

Osteopaths are committed to a programme of Continuing Professional Development.

You can obtain details of an osteopath's registration by telephoning the GOsC on **020 7357 6655**.

Finding an osteopath near you

To find an osteopath near you, details are available in Thomson and Yellow Pages directories.

Alternatively contact the GOsC directly at:

Osteopathy House
176 Tower Bridge Road
London SE1 3LU
Tel: 020 7357 6655
Email: info@osteopathy.org.uk
www.osteopathy.org.uk

Further information

This leaflet is one of a series of information leaflets for the public. Please contact us for copies of the following:

- Osteopathy: An introduction to Osteopathy and the GOsC
- Osteopathy: Arthritis
- Osteopathy: Back Pain
- Osteopathy: Choosing a Bed and choosing a bed
- Osteopathy: Driving
- Osteopathy: Pain Relief
- Osteopathy: Pregnancy
- Osteopathy: Sports
- Osteopathy: Work Strain

For further information and lists of local practitioners please contact the Osteopathic Information Service, General Osteopathic Council, Osteopathy House, 176 Tower Bridge Road, London, SE1 3LU. Telephone number 0207 357 6655 or alternatively use our searchable database on www.osteopathy.org.uk