



OSTEOPATHIC INFORMATION SERVICE

OSTEOPATHY: Pain Relief

One of the main purposes of osteopathy is pain relief. Osteopathy helps people of all ages who suffer from pain, tackling complaints ranging from sports and work-related injuries to arthritis and sciatica. The osteopath's role is to alleviate pain and improve the patient's mobility in order to make life more comfortable.

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.

What is pain?

Pain is your body's way of telling you that something is wrong. It is often caused by swelling of tissue, which creates pressure on nerves and leads to discomfort. Pain is a useful mechanism to alert you to a problem, and stops you from damaging your body further. It should always, therefore, be taken seriously.

Pain can affect many areas of the body, but particularly the lower back, head, neck, joints and legs. It can result from injuries and arthritis, and can also manifest itself in the form of rheumatic pain and period pain.

Osteopathy and the treatment of pain

Osteopaths can diagnose the cause of pain and help to ease it by reducing tissue inflammation. Treatment methods range from massage of muscles and connective tissues to manipulation and stretching of joints. This helps to reduce muscle spasm, to increase mobility and to create a healthier state in which damaged tissues can heal.

Much long-term, recurrent pain is caused by degenerative changes to the body's framework. Nobody can reverse this process of ageing, but osteopathic treatment may still ease pain. Pain control is an important part of treatment and osteopaths give guidance on simple self-help methods to use at home.

The skilled techniques of osteopathy can often allow you a speedy return to normal activity. If you have had a pain for a long time, and other forms of treatment have not helped, osteopathic treatment can be beneficial, although it may require time and patience.

Key points to remember...

- Osteopaths are skilled health care professionals.
- Osteopaths deal with pain every day.
- Osteopaths treat six million people suffering from pain each year.
- Osteopaths can help you with treatment and advice on self help.
- Osteopaths treat acute and chronic pain.
- Osteopaths can help prevent pain from recurring.

Visiting an osteopath

On your first visit, and before examination begins, the osteopath will discuss and record your medical history in detail. You will then normally be asked to remove some of your clothing so that a series of observations and biomechanical assessments can be performed.

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. This will allow a full diagnosis of the problem and will enable the osteopath to tailor a treatment plan to your needs.

Your osteopath should make you 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 severity of the problem.

An increasing number of osteopaths work alongside GPs, so it may be possible for your doctor to refer you 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: Babies and children
- Osteopathy: Back Pain
- Osteopathy: Choosing a Bed and choosing a bed
- Osteopathy: Driving
- 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